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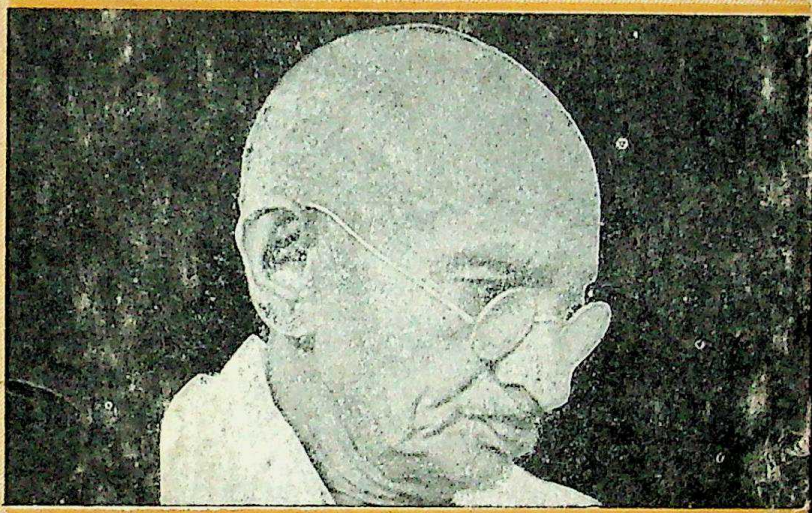
THE LAW OF CONTINENCE: BRAHMACHARYA



"I hold that a life of perfect continence in thought, speech and action is necessary for reaching spiritual perfection. And the nation that does not possess such men is the poorer for the want."

M K Gandhi

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BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY - 7

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PURITY OF THOUGHT

"Let no one desirous of leading a pure and chaste life think that the practice of it is not worth pursuing because the expected result is not attained in a moment. And let no one expect perfection of body after successful practice of continence even for a long time.

"The majority of us, who endeavour to follow the rules laid down for observing continence, labour under three handicaps. We have inherited imperfect bodies and weak wills from our parents, and by an incorrect life we find ourselves to have further debilitated both our bodies and wills.... And the third handicap we labour under is, that in spite of the exercise of all the artificial and outward restraint, we find ourselves unable to restrain and regularise our thoughts.

"Control over thought is a long, painful and laborious process. But I am convinced that no time, no labour and no pain is too much for the glorious result to be reached. The purity of thought is possible only with a faith in God bordering on definite experience."

—M. K. GANDHI

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I like Anandswamy's
idea of collecting my
writings under suitable
heads. The reader will not
fail to appreciate the
labour he has given to
securing attractive
printing & binding.

M K Gandhi

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"Pocket Gandhi Series" No. 7

THE LAW OF CONTINENCE: BRAHMACHARYA

BY

M. K. GANDHI

EDITED & PUBLISHED

BY

ANAND T. HINGORANI

G.M. College of Education
Raipur, Bantalab
Jammu.
Acc. No. 2869 (B)
Dated 3/2/2016

1964

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

BOMBAY-7

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First Edition : March 1964

Price : Rs. 1.50 nP.

PRINTED IN INDIA

By P. H. Raman at Associated Advertisers & Printers, 505, Tardeo, Arthur Road, Bombay 34, and Published by S. Ramakrishnan, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay 7, for Anand T. Hingorani, 7 Edmonstone Road, Allahabad (India).

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PREFACE

THE Law of Continence or *Brahmacharya*, as propounded and practised by Gandhiji, is not only what is ordinarily understood by the term, but vastly much more. It is not mere mechanical celibacy, it means "complete control over all the senses, and freedom from lust in thought, word and deed." Mere control of animal passion is not enough.

The observance of *Brahmacharya* has been considered to be extremely difficult, almost impossible, because we have understood the word in a very narrow, restricted sense. Ours is bound to be a vain effort if we attempt to control only one organ and allow free play to all the others. For, says Gandhiji: "To hear suggestive stories with the ears, to see suggestive sights with the eyes, to taste stimulating foods with the tongue, to touch exciting things with the hands, and then, at the same time, expect to control the only remaining organ, is like putting one's hands in a fire and then expecting to escape being burnt." He, therefore, advises practising simultaneous self-control in all directions, if the attempt is to prove successful.

It is well, however, to appreciate the distinction that Gandhiji draws between control and suppression of the senses. His definition of *Brahmacharya* means not suppression of one or more senses, but complete mastery over them all. The two states he holds to be fundamentally different. Says he: "I can suppress all my senses to-day, but it may take aeons to conquer them. Conquest means using them as my willing

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slaves. I can prick the ear drum and suppress the sense of hearing by a simple, painless operation. This is worthless. I must train the ear so that it refuses to hear gossip, lewd talk, blasphemy; but it is open to the celestial music, it will hear the most distant cry for succour from thousands of miles."

This training and ultimate conquest of the senses is comparatively easy of attainment by those who have realized the necessity of observing *Brahmacharya* in thought, word and deed. Such aspirants will find in this book not only the complete and comprehensive definition of true *Brahmacharya*, but also the ways and means of achieving the same. Gandhiji's rich and varied experiments in this regard will be of incalculable value to them and afford them all the necessary guidance and inspiration on their onward march to the goal. No doubt, it is an uphill task that needs a Herculean effort to accomplish it. But those who are gifted with abiding faith in themselves will not give up the effort in despair, but ever continue to put forth manly endeavour which, as Gandhiji says, is sure to win them Divine Grace in God's good time.

ANAND T. HINGORANI

7, Edmonstone Road
Allahabad (India)
January 1, 1964.

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1. NECESSITY OF CONTINENCE

MANY are the keys to health, and they are all quite essential; but one thing needful, above all others, is *Brahmacharya*. Pure air, pure water, and wholesome food certainly contribute to health. But how can we be healthy if we expend all the health that we acquire? How can we help being paupers if we spend all the money that we earn? There can be no doubt that men and women can never be virile or strong unless they observe true *Brahmacharya*.

What, then, is *Brahmacharya?* It means that men and women should refrain from carnal knowledge of each other. That is to say, they should not touch each other with a carnal thought, they should not think of it even in their dreams. Their mutual glances should be free from all suggestion of carnality. The hidden strength that God has given us should be conserved by rigid self-discipline, and transmitted into energy and power,—not merely of body, but also of mind and soul.

Meshes of Sensuality

But what is the spectacle that we actually see around us? Men and women, old and young, without exception, are caught in the meshes of sensuality. Blinded for the most part by lust, they lose all sense of right and wrong. I have myself seen even boys and girls behaving as if they were mad under its fatal in-

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fluence, I, too, have behaved likewise under similar influences, and it could not well be otherwise. For the sake of a momentary pleasure, we sacrifice in an instant all the stock of vital energy that we have laboriously accumulated. The infatuation over, we find ourselves in a miserable condition. The next morning we feel hopelessly weak and tired, and the mind refuses to do its work. Then, in order to remedy the mischief, we consume large quantities of milk, *bhasmas*, *yakutis* and what not. We take all sorts of 'nervine tonics' and place ourselves at the doctor's mercy for repairing the waste, and for recovering the capacity for enjoyment. So the days pass and years, until at length old age comes upon us, and finds us utterly emasculated in body and in mind.

The Law of Nature

But the law of Nature is just the reverse of this. The older we grow, the keener should our intellect be; the longer we live, the greater should be our capacity to communicate the benefit of our accumulated experience to our fellow-men. And such is indeed the case with those who have been true *Brahmacharis*. They know no fear of death, and they do not forget God even in the hour of death; nor do they indulge in vain desires. They die with a smile on their lips, and boldly face the day of judgment. They are true men and women; and of them alone can it be said that they have conserved their health.

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We hardly realize the fact that incontinence is the root-cause of most of the vanity, anger, fear, and jealousy in the world. If our mind is not under our control, if we behave once or oftener every day more foolishly than even little children, what sins may we not commit consciously or unconsciously? How can we pause to think of the consequences of our actions, however vile or sinful they may be?

True Brahmacharis

But you may ask: "Who has ever seen a true *Brahmachari* in this sense? If all men should turn *Brahmacharis*, would not humanity be extinct and the whole world go to rack and ruin?" We will leave aside the religious aspect of this question and discuss it simply from the secular point of view. To my mind, these questions only betray our timidity and worse. We have not the strength of will to observe *Brahmacharya*, and, therefore, set about finding pretexts for evading our duty. The race of true *Brahmacharis* is by no means extinct; but if they were commonly to be met with, of what value would *Brahmacharya* be? Thousands of hardy labourers have to go and dig deep into the bowels of the earth in search of diamonds, and at length they get perhaps merely a handful of them out of heaps and heaps of rock. How much greater, then, should be the labour involved in the discovery of the infinitely more precious diamond of a *Brahmachari?* If the observance of *Brahmacharya* should mean the end of the world, that is none of our business. Are we

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God that we should be so anxious about its future? He who created it will surely see to its preservation. We need not trouble to enquire whether other people practise *Brahmacharya* or not. When we enter a trade or profession, do we ever pause to consider what the fate of the world would be if all men were to do likewise? The true *Brahmachari* will, in the long run, discover for himself answers to such questions.

What about the Married ?

But how can men engrossed in the cares of the material world put these ideas into pratice? What about those who are married? What shall they do who have children? And what shall be done by those people who cannot control themselves? We have already seen what is the highest state for us to attain. We should keep this ideal constantly before us, and try to approach it to the utmost of our capacity. When little children are taught to write the letters of the alphabet, we show them the perfect shapes of the letters, and they try to reproduce them as best they can. In the same way, if we steadily work up to the ideal of *Brahmacharya*, we may ultimately succeed in realizing it. What if we have married already? The law of Nature is that *Brahmacharya* may be broken only when the husband and wife feel a desire for progeny. Those who, remembering this law, violate *Brahmacharya* once in four or five years, will not become slaves to lust, nor lose much of their stock of vital energy.

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Madness of Sexual Passion

But alas! how rare are those men and women who yield to the sexual craving merely for the sake of offspring! The vast majority turn to sexual enjoyment merely to satisfy their carnal passion, with the result that children are born to them quite against their will. In the madness of sexual passion, they give no thought to the consequences of their acts. In this respect, men are even more to blame than women. The man is blinded so much by his lust that he never cares to remember that his wife is weak and unable to bear or rear up a child. In the West, indeed, people have transgressed all bounds. They indulge in sexual pleasures, and devise measures in order to evade the responsibilities of parenthood. Many books have been written on this subject, and a regular trade is being carried on in contraceptives. We are as yet free from this sin, but we do not shrink from imposing the heavy burden of maternity on our women, and we are not concerned even to find that our children are weak, impotent and imbecile.

A Sign of the Wrath of God

Every time we get a child, we offer thanksgiving prayers to God and so seek to hide from ourselves the wickedness of our acts. Should we not rather deem it a sign of the wrath of God to have children who are feeble, sensual, crippled and timid? Is it a matter for joy that mere boys and girls should have children? Is it not rather a curse? We all know that the prema-

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ture fruit of a too young plant weakens the parent, and so we try all means of delaying the appearance of fruit. But we sing hymns of praise and thanksgiving to God when a child is born of a boy-father and a girl-mother! Could anything be more dreadful? Do we think that the world is going to be saved by the countless swarms of such impotent children endlessly multiplying in India or elsewhere? Verily, we are, in this respect, far worse than even the lower animals; for, in their case, the male and the female are brought together solely with the object of breeding from them.

Fatal Merry-Making

Man and woman should regard it a sacred duty to keep apart from the moment of conception up to the time when the child is weaned. But we go on with our fatal merry-making, blissfully forgetful of that sacred obligation. This almost incurable disease enfeebles our mind and leads us to an early grave, after making us drag a miserable existence for a short while. Married people should understand the true function of marriage, and should not violate *Brahmacharya* except with a view to progeny.

Sensuality—a Poison

But this is so difficult under our present conditions of life. Our diet, our ways of life, our common talk, and our environments are all equally calculated to rouse animal passions; and sensuality is like a poison eating into our vitals. Some people may doubt the possibility

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of our being able to free ourselves from this bondage. This is written not for those who go about with such doubting of heart, but only for those who are really in earnest, and who have the courage to take active steps for self-improvement. Those who are quite content with their present abject condition will find this tedious even to read; but I hope it will be of some service to those who have realized and are disgusted with their own miserable plight.

Advice to the Unmarried

From all that has been said, it follows that those who are still unmarried should try to remain so; but if they cannot help marrying, they should defer it as long as possible. Young men, for instance, should take a vow to remain unmarried till the age of twenty-five or thirty. We cannot consider here all the advantages other than physical which they will reap and which are, as it were, added unto the rest.

Request to the Parents

My request to those parents who read this chapter is that they should not tie a mill-stone round the necks of their children by marrying them young. They should look to the welfare of the rising generation, and not merely seek to pamper their own vanity. They should cast aside all silly notions of family pride or respectability, and cease to indulge in such heartless practices. Let them rather, if they are true well-wishers of their children, look to their physical, mental and moral

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improvement. What greater disservice can they do to their progeny than compel them to enter upon married life, with all its tremendous responsibilities and cares, while they are mere children?

Sexual Enjoyment

Then again, the true laws of health demand that the man who loses his wife, as well as the woman that loses her husband, should remain single ever after. There is a difference of opinion among medical men as to whether young men and women need ever let their vital energy escape, some answering the question in the affirmative, others in the negative. But while doctors thus disagree, we must not give way to over-indulgence from an idea that we are supported by medical authority. I can affirm, without the slightest hesitation, from my own experience as well as that of others, that sexual enjoyment is not only not necessary for, but is positively injurious to health. All the strength of body and mind that has taken long to acquire is lost all at once by a single dissipation of the vital energy. It takes a long time to regain this lost vitality, and even then there is no saying that it can be thoroughly recovered. A broken mirror may be mended and made to do its work, but it can never be anything but a broken mirror.

Health and Morals

As has already been pointed out, the preservation of our vitality is impossible without pure air, pure water,

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pure and wholesome food, as well as pure thoughts. So vital indeed is the relation between health and morals, that we can never be perfectly healthy unless we lead a clean life. The earnest man, who forgetting the errors of the past, begins to live a life of purity, will be able to reap the fruit of it straightway. Those who practise true *Bramacharya,* even for a short period, will see how their body and mind improve steadily in strength and power, and they will not, at any cost, be willing to part with this treasure.

My Personal Testimony

I have myself been guilty of lapses even after having fully understood the value of *Brahmacharya,* and have, of course, paid dearly for it. I am filled with shame and remorse when I think of the terrible contrast between my condition before and after these lapses. But from the errors of the past I have now learnt to preserve this treasure intact, and I fully hope, with God's grace, to continue to preserve it in the future; for I have, in my own person, experienced the inestimable benefits of *Brahmacharya.* I was married early, and had become the father of children as a mere youth. When, at length, I awoke to the reality of my situation, I found that I was steeped in ignorance about the fundamental laws of our being. I shall consider myself amply rewarded for writing this chapter if at least a single reader takes a warning from my failings and experiences, and profits thereby. Many people have told me—and I also believe it—that I am full of en-

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ergy and enthusiasm, and that I am by no means weak in mind; some even accuse me of strength bordering on obstinacy. Nevertheless, there is still bodily and mental ill-health as a legacy of the past. And yet, when compared with my friends, I may call myself healthy and strong. If, even after twenty years of sensual enjoyment, I have been able to reach this state, how much better off should I have been if I had kept myself pure during those twenty years as well? It is my full conviction that if only I had lived a life of unbroken *Brahmacharya* all through, my energy and enthusiasm would have been a thousandfold greater, and I should have been able to devote them all to the furtherance of my country's cause as my own. If an imperfect *Brahmachari* like myself can reap such benefit, how much more wonderful must be the gain in power,—physical, mental as well as moral,—that unbroken *Brahmacharaya* can bring to us!

Adultery and Prostitution

When so strict is the Law of *Brahmacharya,* what shall we say of those guilty of the unpardonable sin of illegitimate sexual enjoyment? The evil arising from adultery and prostitution is a vital question of religion and morality and cannot be fully dealt with in a treatise on health. Here we are only concerned to point out how thousands who are guilty of these sins are afflicted by venereal diseases. God is merciful in this that the punishment swiftly overtakes sinners. Their short span of life is spent in abject bondage to quacks

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in a futile quest after a remedy for their ills. If adultery and prostitution disappeared, at least half the present number of doctors would find their occupation gone. So inextricably indeed has venereal disease caught mankind in its clutches that thoughtful medical men have been forced to admit, that so long as adultery and prostitution continue, there is no hope for the human race, all the discoveries of curative medicine notwithstanding. The medicines for these diseases are so poisonous that although they may appear to have done some good for the time being, they give rise to other and still more terrible diseases which are transmitted from generation to generation.

How Married People Can Observe Brahmacharya

In concluding this chapter, which has grown longer than I expected, let me briefly point out how married people can observe *Brahmacharya*. It is not enough to observe the laws of health as regards air, water and food. The husband should avoid privacy with his wife. Little reflection is needed to show that the only possible motive for privacy between husband and wife is the desire for sexual enjoyment. They should occupy separate rooms at night, and be constantly engaged in good work during the day. They should read such books as fill them with noble thoughts and meditate over the lives of great men, and live in the constant realization of the fact that sexual enjoyment is the root of much misery. Whenever they feel a craving for sexual indulgence, they should bathe in cold water, so

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that the heat of passion may be cooled down, and be refined into the energy of virtuous activity. This is a difficult thing to do, but we have been born to wrestle with difficulties and conquer them; and he who has not the will to do so can never enjoy the supreme blessing of true health.

—*Guide to Health*: Part I, Chap. IX.

2. DUTY OF CHASTITY

IT is only in India that from childhood we must hear of marriages. Parents have no other thought, no other ambition, save that of seeing their children well married and provided for. The one thing brings premature decay of mind and body, and the other induces idleness and often makes of one a parasite. We exaggerate the difficulty of chastity and voluntary poverty and impute extraordinary merit to them, reserve them for *Mahatmas* and *Yogis* and rule the latter out of ordinary life, forgetting that real *Mahatmya* and *Yoga* are unthinkable in a society where the ordinary level is brought down to the mud-bank. On the principle, that evil like the hare travels faster than good which like the tortoise though steady goes slow, voluptuousness of the West comes to us with lightning speed, and with all its variegated enchantment dazzles and blinds us to the realities of life. We are almost ashamed of chastity, and are in danger of looking upon self-imposed poverty as a crime in the face of the Western splendour that descends upon us from minute to minute through the cable, and day to day through the

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steamers that discharge their cargo on our shores. But the West is not wholly what we see in India. Even as the South African Whites ill-judge us when they judge us through the Indian settlers, so shall we ill-judge the West through the human and the other Western cargo that delivers itself to us every day. There is in the West a small but inexhaustible reservoir of purity and strength, which those who have eyes of penetration may see beneath the deceptive surface. Throughout the European desert, there are oases from which those who will may drink the purest water of life. Chastity and voluntary poverty are adopted without brag, without bluster, and in all humility by hundreds of men and women, often for no other than the all-sufficing cause of service of some dear one or of the country. We often prate about spirituality as if it had nothing to do with the ordinary affairs of life, and had been reserved for anchorites lost in the Himalayan forests or concealed in some inaccessible Himalayan cave. Spirituality that has no bearing on and produces no effect on everyday life is 'an airy nothing.' Let young men and women know that it is their duty, if they would purify the atmosphere about them and shed their weakness, to be and remain chaste and know, too, that it is not so difficult as they have been taught to imagine.

—*Self-Restraint* v. *Self-Indulgence*: P. 36.

3. IN CONFIDENCE

THE word in Sanskrit corresponding to celibacy is *Brahmacharya*, and the latter means much more than celibacy. *Brahmacharya* means perfect control

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over all the senses and organs. For the perfect *Brahmachari* nothing is impossible. But is it an ideal state which is rarely realized. It is almost like Euclid's line which exists only in imagination, never capable of being physicaly drawn. It is nevertheless an important definition in geometry yielding great result. So may a perfect *Brahmachari* exist only in imagination. But if we did not keep him constantly before our mind's eye, we should be like a ruderless ship. The nearer the approach to the imaginary state, the greater the perfection.

I hold that a life of perfect continence in thought, speech and action is necessary for reaching spiritual perfection. And the nation that does not possess such men is the poorer for the want.

Advice to Parents

Parents must teach their children the practice of *Brahmacharya*. According to the Hindu *Shastras*, the lowest age at which boys may marry is 25. If the mothers of India could be inclined to believe that it is sinful to train boys and girls for a married life, half the marriages of India will automatically stop. Nor need we believe the fetish of early puberty among girls because of our hot climate. I have never known a grosser superstition than this of early puberty. I make bold to say that the climate has absolutely nothing to do with puberty. What does bring about untimely puberty is the mental and moral atmosphere surrounding our family life. Mothers and other relations make

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it a religious duty to teach innocent children that they are to be married when they reach a particular age. They are betrothed when they are infants, or even babes in arms. The dress and the food of the children are also aids to stimulating passions. We dress our children like dolls, not for their but for our pleasure and vanity. I have brought up children by the score. And they have without difficulty taken to, and delighted in, any dress given to them. We provide them with all kinds of heating and stimulating foods. Our blind love takes no note of their capacity. The result undoubtedly is an early adolescence, immature progeny and an early grave. Parents furnish an object lesson which the children easily grasp. By reckless indulgence in their passions, they serve for their children as models of unrestrained licence. Every untimely addition to the family is ushered in amid trumpets of joy and feasting. The wonder is that we are not less restrained than we are, notwithstanding our surroundings. I have not a shadow of a doubt that married people, if they wished well to the country and wanted to see India become a nation of strong and handsome full-formed men and women, would practise perfect self-restraint.

To the Newly-Married

I tender this advice even to the newly married. It is easier not to do a thing at all than to cease doing it, even as it is easier for a life abstainer to remain teetotaller than for a drunkard or even a temperate man

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to abstain. To remain erect is infinitely easier than to rise from a fall. It is wrong to say that continence can be safely preached only to the satiated. There is hardly any meaning, either, in preaching continence to an enfeebled person.

May I point out to parents that they ought not to fall into the argumentative trap of the rights of partners? Consent is required for indulgence, never for restraint; this is an obvious truth.

—*Young India*: Oct. 13, 1920.

4. CELIBACY IN MARRIAGE

THOSE who want to perform national service, or those who want to have a glimpse of the real religious life, must lead a celibate life, no matter if married or unmarried. Marriage but brings a woman closer together with the man, and they become friends in a special sense, never to be parted either in this life or in the lives that are to come. But I do not think that, in our conception of marriage, our lusts should necessarily enter.

—*Speeches & Writings of M. Gandhi* P. 382.

It is not enough that one should not look upon any woman or man with a lustful eye; animal passion must be so controlled as to be excluded even from the mind. If married, one must not have a carnal mind regarding one's wife or husband, but must consider her or him as one's life-long friend, and establish relationship of perfect purity. A sinful touch, gesture or word is a direct breach of this principle (of celibacy).

—*Young India*: June 14, 1928.

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5. INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

Q. I would like to ask whether you are against the institution of marriage.

A. I shall have to answer this question at some length. The aim of human life is *Moksha*. As a Hindu, I believe that *Moksha* is freedom from birth by breaking the bonds of the flesh, by becoming one with God. Now, marriage is a hindrance in the attainment of this supreme object, inasmuch as it only tightens the bonds of flesh. Celibacy is a great help, inasmuch as it enables one to lead a life of full surrender to God. What is the object generally understood of marriage, except a repetition of one's own kind? And why need you advocate marriage? It propagates itself. It requires no agency to promote its growth.

Q. But, must you advocate celibacy and preach it to one and all?

A. Yes. Then, you fear there will be an end of creation? No. The extreme logical result would be, not extinction of the human species, but the transference of it to a higher plane.

Q. But may not an artist or a poet or a great genius leave a legacy of his genius to posterity through his own children?

A. Certainly not. He will have more disciples than he can ever have children; and through those disciples, all his gifts to the world will be handed down in a way that nothing else can do it. It will be the

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soul's marriage with the spirit; the progeny being the disciple,—a sort of divine procreation. No, you must leave marriage to take care of itself. Repetition, and not growth, would be the result; for lust has come to play the most important part in marriage.

—*Young India*: Nov. 20, 1924.

6. WHAT IS BRAHMACHARYA ?

A FRIEND asks: "What is *Brahmacharya?* Is it possible to practise it to perfection? If possible, do you do so?"

The full and proper meaning of *Brahmacharya* is search of *Brahma*. *Brahma* pervades everything and can, therefore, be searched by diving into and realizing the inner self. This realization is impossible without complete control of the senses. *Brahmacharya* thus means control in thought, word and action, of all the senses at all times and in all places.

A man or woman completely practising *Brahmacharya* is absolutely free from passion. Such a one, therefore, lives nigh unto God, is God-like.

My Strivings after Brahmacharya

I have no doubt that it is possible to practise such *Brahmacharya* in thought, word and action to the fullest extent. I am sorry to say that I have not yet reached that perfect state of *Brahmacharya,* though I am every moment of my life striving to reach it. I have not given up hope of reaching that state in this

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very body. I have gained control over the body. I can be master of myself during my waking hours. I have fairly succeeded in learning to control my tongue. But I have yet to cover many stages in the control of my thoughts. They do not come and go at my bidding. My mind is thus constantly in a state of insurrection against itself.

Control over Thoughts

In my waking moments, however, I can stop my thoughts from colliding with one another. I may say that in the waking state the mind is secure against the approach of evil thoughts. But in the hours of sleep, control over the thoughts is much less. When asleep, the mind would be swayed by all sorts of thoughts, by unexpected dreams and by desire for things done and enjoyed by the flesh before. Such thoughts or dreams, when unclean, are followed by the usual consequences. Whilst such experiences are possible, a person cannot be said to be free from all passion. The deviation is, however, diminishing, but has not yet ceased. If I had complete mastery over my thoughts, I should not have suffered from the diseases of pleurisy, dysentery and appendicitis that I did during the last ten years.

Healthy Soul in Healthy Body

I believe that a healthy soul should inhabit a healthy body. To the extent, therefore, that the soul grows

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into health and freedom from passion, to that extent the body also grows into that state. This does not mean that a healthy body should be necessarily strong in flesh. A brave soul often inhabits a lean body. After a certain stage, the flesh diminishes in proportion to the growth of the soul. A perfectly healthy body may be very fleshless. A muscular body is often heir to many an ill. Even if it is apparently free from disease, it is not immune from infections, contagions and the like. A perfectly healthy body, on the contrary, is proof against all these. Incorruptible blood has the inherent virtue of resisting all infections.

Even a Little Effort is Not Wasted

Such an equipoise is, indeed, difficult of attainment. Otherwise I should have reached it, because my soul is witness to the fact that I would spare no pains to attain to this perfect state. No outward obstacle can stand between me and that state. But it is not easy for all, at least for me, to efface past *samskaras*. But the delay has not in the least dismayed me. For, I have a mental picture of that perfect state. I have even dim glimpses of it. The progress achieved fills me with hope, rather than despair. But even if I depart from this body before the hope is fulfilled, I would not think that I had failed. For, I believe in rebirth as much as I believe in the existence of my present body. I, therefore, know that even a little effort is not wasted.

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I have said so much about myself for the simple reason that my correspondents and others like them may have patience and self-confidence. The soul is one in all. Its possibilities are, therefore, the same for every one. With some, it has manifested itself; with others, it has yet to do so. Patient striving would carry everyone through and to the same experience.

Ordinary Meaning of Brahmacharya

I have, heretofore, discussed *Brahmacharya* in its wider meaning. The ordinary accepted sense of *Brahmacharya* is the control in thought, word and action of animal passion. And it is quite proper thus to restrict its meaning. It has been thought to be very difficult to practise this *Brahmacharya*. This control of the carnal desire has been so very difficult, has become nearly impossible, because equal stress has not been laid on the control of the palate. It is also the experience of our physicians that a body enfeebled by disease is always a favourite abode of carnal desire, and *Brahmacharya* by an enfeebled race is difficult to practise naturally.

Physical Culture

I have talked above of a lean but healthy body. Let no one understand me to have deprecated physical culture. I have talked of *Brahmacharya* in its perfect aspect in my very crude language. It is likely, therefore, to be misunderstood. But one, who would prac-

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tise complete control of all the senses, must needs welcome the waning of the flesh. With the extinction of attachment to the flesh, comes the extinction of the desire to have muscular strength.

But the body of a true *Brahmachari* is bound to be exceptionally fresh and wiry. This *Brahmacharya* is something unearthly. He who is not swayed by carnal desire even in his sleep, is worthy of all adoration. The control of every other sense shall be 'added unto' him.

—*Young India*: June 5, 1924.

7. IN ITS WIDER MEANING

BRAHMACHARYA appears to be difficult because we do not control the other senses. Take for example organ of taste which leads the rest. *Brahmacharya* will come easy to anyone who controls his palate. Zoologists tell us that *Brahmacharya* is observed by the lower animals, as for instance cattle, to a greater extent than by human beings, and this is a fact. The reason is that cattle have perfect control over the palate, not by will but by instinct. They subsist on mere fodder, and of this, too, they take a quantity just sufficient for nutrition. They eat to live, do not live to eat; while our case is just the reverse. The mother pampers her child with all kinds of delicacies. She believes that she can evince her love only by feeding the child to the utmost. By doing this she does not enhance the child's enjoyment of his food, but on the other hand makes everything insipid and disgusting

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for him. The taste depends upon hunger. Even sweets will not be as tasteful to one who is not hungry, as a slice of dry bread is to another who is really so. We prepare food in various ways with a variety of spices in order to be able to load the stomach, and wonder when we find *Brahmacharya* difficult to observe.

Use and Misuse of Eyes

We misuse and corrupt the eyes which God has given us, and do not direct them to the right things. Why should not the mother learn *Gayatri* and teach it to the child? She need not trouble with the inner and deeper meaning of the *Mantra*. It is enough for her to understand and explain to the child that it inculcates reverence for the sun. This is but a rough interpretation of the *Mantra* which I am placing before you. How shall we revere the sun? By looking up to the sun and performing an ablution as it were of the eyes. The author of the *Gayatri* was a *Rishi*, a seer. He taught us that nowwhere else can we see such a beautiful drama as is daily staged before our eyes at the time of sunrise. There is no stage-manager greater than God or more sublime, and there is no more magnificent stage than the sky. But where is the mother who washes her child's eyes and then asks him to have a look at the sky?

Use and Misuse of Clothes

Mothers in our country are unfortunately concerned with quite other things. The boy may per-

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haps turn out to be a big official, thanks to his education at school, but we are apt to ignore the very large part the home atmosphere plays in his education. Parents wrap their children up in heavy clothing and smother them, while they fondly imagine that they are adding to their beauty. Clothes are meant just to cover the body, protect it against heat and cold, not to beautify it. If a child is trembling with cold, we must send him to the fireside to warm himself or out into the street for a run, or into the field for work. It is only thus that we can help him to build a splendid constitution. By keeping the child confined in the house, we impart a false warmth to his body. By pampering his body, we only succeed in destroying it.

Obstacles in the Way of Brahmacharya

So much for the clothes. Then again, the light conversation carried on in the house creates a very harmful impression on the child's mind. Elders talk of getting him married. The things which he sees around him also tend to corrupt him. The wonder is that we have not sunk to the lowest depths of barbarism. Restraint is observed in spite of conditions which render it well-nigh impossible. A gracious Providence has so arranged things that man is saved in spite of himself. If we remove all these obstacles in the way of *Brahmacharya*, it not only becomes possible but also easy to observe.

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Touching a Woman

Brahmacharya does not mean that one may not touch a woman, even one's sister, in any circumstances whatsoever. But it does mean that one's state of mind should be as calm and unruffled during such contact as when one touches, say, a piece of paper. A man's *Brahmacharya* avails for nothing if he must hesitate in nursing his sister who is ill. He has to be as free from excitement in case of contact with the fairest damsel on earth, as in contact with a dead body.

—*Navajivan*: Feb. 26, 1925.

8. TRUE CELIBACY

A MAN who consciously sins with his mind, even though he may not sin with his body, is not a celibate. One who cannot remain unmoved at the sight of a woman, however beautiful she may be, is not a celibate. One who keeps his body under control from sheer necessity, does well, but is not a celibate. We may not degrade sacred words by a loose use of them. True celibacy has important results which can be verified. It is a difficult virtue to practise. Many attempt it, but few succeed.

Who is a True Celibate?

Those who walk about the country in the garb of *Sannyasis* are often no more celibates than the ordinary man in the street. Only the latter is often a better man as he makes no pretension to virtue. He is satisfied that his Maker knows his trials, tempta-

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tions and his century of triumphs in resisting temptations, as also his few falls inspite of heroic attempts. He is satisfied to be judged by the world for his falls. His successes he treasures secretely like a miser. He is too humble to make them known. Such a man has hope of redemption. Not so the self-satisfied *Sannyasi* who does not even know the ABC of restraint.

Plea for Humility

It must be taken for granted that those who cultivate Truth, *Ahimsa, Brahmacharya,* must be humble. Truth without humility would be an arrogant caricature. He who wants to practise Truth knows how hard it is. The world may applaud his so-called triumphs. Little does the world know his falls. A truthful man is a chastened being. He has need to be humble. A man who wants to love the whole world including one who calls himself his enemy, knows how impossible it is to do so in his own strength. He must be as mere dust before he can understand the elements of *Ahimsa.* He is nothing if he does not daily grow in humility as he grows in love.

God Triumphs in Us, Never We

A man who would have his eye single, who would regard every woman as his blood sister or mother, has to be less than dust. He stands on the brink of a precipice. The slightest turn of the head brings him down. He dare not wishper his virtue to his very own. For,

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he knows not what the next moment has in store for him. For him, 'pride goeth before destruction and haughtiness before a fall.' Well has the *Gita* said: 'Passions subside in a fasting man, not the desire for them. The desire goes only when man sees God face to face.' And no one can see God face to face who has aught of the 'I' in him. He must become a cypher if he would see God. Who shall dare say in this storm-tossed universe: 'I have won'? God triumphs in us, never we.

Ours is Merely to Make the Attempt

Let us not lower the values of these virtues so that we may all be able to claim them. What is true of the physical world, is true of the spiritual. If, in order to gain a worldly battle, Europe sacrificed several million lives during the late War, itself a transitory event, what wonder that in the spiritual battle millions have to perish in the attempt so that one complete example may be left to the world. It is ours merely to make the attempt in the uttermost humility.

The cultivation of these higher virtues is its own reward. He who cashes any one of them loses his soul. Virtues are not to trade with. My Truth, my *Ahimsa*, my *Brahmacharya* are matters between myself and my Maker. They are not articles of trade. Any man who dares to trade with them will do so at his peril. The world has no standard, no means wherewith to judge these things. They defy scrutiny and

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analysis. Let us, therefore, cultivate them for our own purification.

—*Young India*: June 25, 1925.

9. ROYAL ROAD TO SELF-REALIZATION

BRAHMACHARYA is not mere machnical celibacy; it means complete control over all the senses and freedom from lust in thought, word and deed. As such, it is the royal road to self-realization or attainment of *Brahman*.

The ideal *Brahmachari* has not to struggle with sensual desire or desire for procreation: it never troubles him at all. The whole world will be to him one vast family, he will centre all his ambition in relieving the misery of mankind and the desire for procreation will be to him as gall and wormwood. He who has realized the misery of mankind in all its magnitude, will never be stirred by passion. He will instinctively know the fountain of strength in him, and he will ever persevere to keep it undefiled. His humble strength will command respect of the world, and he will wield an influence greater than that of the sceptred monarch.

Attraction Between Man and Woman

But I am told that this is an impossible ideal, that I do not take count of the natural attraction between man and woman. I refuse to believe that sensual affinity referred to here can be at all regarded as natural; in that case the deluge would soon be over us. The

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natural affinity between man and woman is the attraction between brother and sister, mother and son, or father and daughter. It is that natural attraction that sustains the world. I should find it impossible to live, much less carry on work, if I did not regard the whole of womankind as sisters, daughters or mothers. If I looked at them with lustful eyes, it would be the surest way to perdition.

Procreation—a Natural Phenomenon

Procreation is a natural phenomenon indeed, but within specific limits. A transgression of those limits imperils womankind, emasculates the race, induces disease, puts a premium on vice, and makes the world ungodly. A man in the grip of the sensual desire is a man without moorings. If such a one were to guide society, to flood it with his writings and men were to be swayed by them, where would society be? And yet we have the very thing happening to-day.

Purpose of Marriage

Supposing a moth whirling round a light were to record the moments of its fleeting joy and we were to imitate it, regarding it as an exampler, where would we be? No, I must declare with all the power I can command that sensual attraction even between husband and wife is unnatural. Marriage is meant to cleanse the hearts of the couple of sordid passions and take them nearer to God. Lustless love between hus-

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band and wife is not impossible.[1] Man is not a brute. He has risen to a higher state after countless births in brute creation. He is born to stand, not to walk on all fours or crawl. Bestiality is as far removed from manhood, as matter from spirit.

Means of Attainment

In conclusion, I shall summarize the means to its attainment.

The first step is the realization of its necessity.

The next is gradual control of the senses. A *Brahmachari* must needs control his palate. He must eat to live, and not for enjoyment. He must see only clean things and close his eyes before anything unclean. It is thus a sign of polite breeding to walk with one's eyes towards the ground and not wandering about from object to object. A *Brahmachari* will likewise hear nothing obscene or unclean, smell no strong, stimulating things. The smell of clean earth is far sweeter than the fragrance of artificial scents and essences. Let the aspirant to *Brahmacharya* also keep his hands and feet engaged in all the waking hours in healthful activity. Let him also fast occasionally.

The third step is to have clean companions, clean friends and clean books.

1. "Undefiled love between husband and wife takes one nearer to God than any other love. When sex is mixed with the undefiled love, it takes one away from one's Maker. Hence, if there be no sex consciousness and sexual contact, it is a question whether there is any occasion for marriage." —*Harijan*; Oct. 19, 1947

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The last, and not the least, is prayer. Let him repeat *Ramanama* with all his heart regularly every day, and ask for Divine Grace.

None of these things are difficult for an average man or woman. They are simplicity itself. But their very simplicity is embarrassing. Where there is a will, the way is simple enough. Men have not the will for it and hence vainly grope. The fact, that the world rests on the observance, more or less, of *Brahmacharya* or restraint, means that it is necessary and practicable.

—*Young India*: Feb. 25, 1926.

10. AN AID TO BRAHMACHARYA

TO those who aspire to observe *Brahmacharya*, I do present the spinning wheel. It is not a thing to be despised, for, it is experience here that speaks. A person who wants to subdue his passions has need to be calm. All commotion within him ought to cease; and so quiet and gentle is the motion of the spinning wheel, that it has been known to still the passions of those who have turned it in the fulness of faith. I have been able to compose my anger by turning it, and I can adduce similar testimony of several other *Brahmacharis*. Of course, it would be quite easy to laugh down all such persons as fools and nincompoops, but it would not be found to be cheap in the end. For, the scoffer, in a fit of anger, loses a beautiful means wherewith to compose his passions and attain vigour and strength. I, therefore, particularly recommend to

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every young man and young woman who reads these lines to give the spinning wheel a trial. They will find that shortly after they sit down to spin, their passions begin to subside. I do not mean to say that they would remain calm for all the rest of the day even after the spinning is discountinued; for, human passions are fleeter even than the wind and to subdue them completely requires no end of practice. All that I claim is that in the spinning wheel they will find a powerful means of cultivating steadiness. But then, someone will ask, why do not I recommend the far more poetical rosary, if that is the purpose which it is intended to subserve? My reply to this is that the spinning wheel possesses some virtues in addition to those it has in common with the rosary. I have not prescribed it for a recluse living in a state of nature in a cave of the Himalayas and subsisting on the herbs and roots of the forest. I have placed it only before such countless persons like myself who, while living in the work-a-day world, are anxious to serve the country and to practise *Brahmacharya simultaneously*.

—*Young India*: May 27, 1926.

11. THE LAW OF CONTINENCE

A FRIEND sends me relevant extracts from the *Science of a New Life* by Dr. Cowen. I have not read the book. But the advice contained in the extracts is certainly sound. I have omitted from the extracts paragraphs about food which are not of much value to the Indian reader.

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Let no one desirous of leading a pure and chaste life think that the practice of it is not worth pursuing because the expected result is not attained in a moment. And let no one expect perfection of body after successful practice of continence even for a long time. The majority of us, who endeavour to follow the rules laid down for observing continence, labour under three handicaps. We have inherited imperfect bodies and weak wills from our parents, and by an incorrect life we find ourselves to have further debilitated both our bodies and wills. When a writing advocating purity of life attracts us, we begin the reformation. Such reformation is never too late. But we must not expect the results described in such writings; for, those results are to be expected only from a strictly regulated life from early youth. And the third handicap we labour under is, that in spite of the exercise of all the artificial and outward restraint, we find ourselves unable to restrain and regularize our thoughts.[1] And let every aspirant after a pure life take from me that an impure

1. "Observance of continence should be natural to us, if only we would inhabit our thought world with the right kind of thoughts and deal summarily with the intruders. Indeed, if the right kind settle down in sufficiently large numbers, the intruders will be crowded out no doubt. The process requires courage. But self-restraint never accrues to the faint-hearted. It is the beautiful fruit of watchfulness and ceaseless effort in the form of prayer and fasting. The prayer is not vain repitition, nor fasting mere starvation of the body. Prayer has to come from the heart which knows God by faith, and fasting is abstinence from evil or injurious thought, activity or food. Starvation of the body, when the mind thinks of multiplicity of dishes, is worse than useless."

—*Harijan*: April 10, 1937.

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thought is often as powerful in undermining the body as an impure act. Control over thought is a long, painful and laborious process. But I am convinced that no time, no labour and no pain is too much for the glorious result to be reached. The purity of thought is possible only with a faith in God bordering on definite experience.

* *

"So dear to Heaven is saintly chastity
That when a soul is found sincerely so,
A thousand liveried angles lackey her"

—Milton

"By the use of the term 'continence' is meant the voluntary and entire abstinence from sexual indulgence in any form and having complete control over the passions by one who knows their power, and who but for his pure life and steady will, not only could but would indulge in them.

* *

"The advantages of a strictly continent life are: The nervous system is invigorated and strengthened. The special senses—the sight, hearing etc. are strong, delicate and acute. The disgestive system is kept normal and man knows not what a sick day is. The growth of body is filled up and rounded out, and a full measure of years may come but old age never; for the last days, in their pleasurable enjoyment of good, healthy and a sound mind, are as were the days

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of his childhood. The brain is enlarged and perfect, memory grows strong, the perceptive and reflective faculties increase in power as shown in the ability to originate and execute, the calm, self-possessed strength to endure, and gentleness, courage, generosity, love grows and ripens, and the soul in its exercise reaches up and commingles with the Spirit of God. The reproductive element is preserved in all its life-renewing and life-giving power until full ripeness of years.

"The Plan of Life:—It is required in the individuals whose desire is to join the noble army of the continent of mankind, that they relinquish many of their souls, idols. The object aimed at is a high one and they will have many sore and bitter trials; but the exercise of a firm will, the strength of a new manhood, and the courage of a positive soul will conquer, and so enable them to enjoy the glorious attribute of continence.

"But the individual whose earnest desire is for a pure and healthy life, no suggestion or hint should be overlooked, that will, in the remotest way, help to the desired end. And individual, be he never so incontinent or licentious, will, if he adopts this plan of life, very speedily recover though it may cause him much mental and bodily misery. A sound faith, coupled with determined perseverance, will accomplish the desirable and happy end.

"The following are to be strictly avoided by those whose desire it is to lead a pure, chaste, and continent life:

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"Tobacco in all its forms. All manner of alcoholic liquors. Tea, coffe and chocolate. Late suppers and over-eating. Sweetmeats, candies, etc. White bread when it is possible to get the graham. Pork and all fat and salt meats, sausages, pickles etc. Salt except in moderate quantities, pepper, mustard, spices, vinegar and other condiments. Mince and other pies and all manner of pastry.

"All constriction of dress about the body.

"Feather beds and pillows and heavy bed covering. Unventilated and unlighted bed-rooms. Remaining in bed in the morning after awaking. Uncleanliness of the body, Turkish and Russian baths.

"Idleness and inaction of body and mind. Companions of doubtful or bad natures. Irresolute will.

"Drugs and patent medicines. Quack doctors.

"In the foregoing list, there are many things that the majority of mankind will think twice about before relinquishing their use. Yet to the individual whose desire is for a true life, all and each item of the list must be discarded. There is not an article of food, condiment or so-called luxury mentioned above, that is in the remotest way necessary to the growth and nourishment of a healthy body and soul. I assert without the fear of successful contradiction, that any person disregarding, in whole or in part, the foregoing plan of life, cannot be healthy, chaste, continent or even a Christian.

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"The things above enumerated you are commanded to discard, if you would avoid sickly, irritable, fretful, licentious and curtailed life. The things below enumerated you are requested to observe, use and enjoy, if you would live a healthy life, a continent life, a happy and a long life:

"The cultivation of a firm and determined will. The active morning and evening exercise of the religious sentiments.

"In the right and faithful observance of these laws man will find all the requirements necessary to the growth of perfect health, purity of body, nobleness of soul, and, above and over all, CONTINENCE. By the just observance of these laws, woman will acquire and retain beauty,—beauty of face, form and character; and she will retain and gain strength,—strength of body, mind and soul; but, above all, will she be pure, lovable and chaste."

—*Young India*: Aug. 25, 1927.

12. MY STRIVINGS AFTER BRAHMACHARYA

I HAD been wedded to a monogamous ideal ever since my marriage, faithfulness to my wife being part of the love of Truth. But it was in South Africa that I came to realize the importance of observing *Brahmacharya* even with respect to my wife. I cannot definitely say what circumstance or what book it was that set my thoughts in that direction, but I have a recollection that the predominant factor was the in-

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fluence of Raychandbhai. I can still recall a conversation that I had with him.

Mrs. Gladstone's Devotion

On one occasion, I spoke to him in high praise of Mrs. Gladstone's devotion to her husband. I had read somewhere that Mrs. Gladstone insisted on preparing tea for Mr. Gladstone even in the House of Commons, and that this had become a rule in the life of this illustrious couple, whose actions were governed by regularity. I spoke of this to the poet and incidentally eulogized conjugal love. "Which of the two do you prize more," asked Raychandbhai, "the love of Mrs. Gladstone for her husband as his wife, or her devoted service irrespective of her relation to Mr. Gladstone? Supposing she had been his sister, or his devoted servant, and ministered to him with the same attention, what would you have said? Do we not have instances of such devoted sisters or servants? Supposing you had found the same loving devotion in a male servant, would you have been pleased in the same way as in Mrs. Gladstone's case? Just examine the viewpoint suggested by me."

Raychandbhai's Words Gripped Me

Raychandbhai was himself married. I have an impression that at the moment his words sounded harsh, but they gripped me irresistibly. The devotion of a servant was, I felt, a thousand times more praiseworthy than that of a wife to her husband. There

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was nothing surprising in the wife's devotion to her husband, as there was an indissoluble bond between them. The devotion was perfectly natural. But it required a special effort to cultivate equal devotion between master and servant. The poet's point of view began gradually to grow upon me.

What then, I asked myself, should be my relation with my wife? Did my faithfulness consist in making my wife the instrument of my lust? So long as I was the slave of lust, my faithfulness was worth nothing. To be fair to my wife, I must say that she was never the temptress. It was, therefore, the easiest thing for me to take the vow of *Brahmacharya*, if only I willed it. It was my weak will or lustful attachment that was the obstacle.

My Striving after Self-Control

Even after my conscience had been roused in the matter, I failed twice. I failed because the motive that acuated the effort was none the highest. My main object was to escape having more children. Whilst in England, I had read something about contraceptives. If Dr. Allinson's birth control propaganda had some temporary effect on me, Mr. Hills' opposition to those methods and his advocacy of internal effort as opposed to outward means, in a word, of self-control, had a far greater effect, which in due time came to be abiding. Seeing, therefore, that I did not desire more children, I began to strive after self-control. There was endless difficulty in the task.

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We began to sleep in separate beds. I decided to retire to bed only after the day's work had left me completely exhausted. All these efforts did not seem to bear much fruit, but when I look back upon the past, I feel that the final resolution was the cumulative effect of those unsuccessful strivings.

Importance of Vows

The importance of vows grew upon me more clearly than ever before. I realized that a vow, far from closing the door to real freedom, opened it. Upto this time, I had not met with success because the will had lacking, because I had no faith in myself, no faith in the grace of God, and, therefore, my mind had been tossed on the boisterous sea of doubt. I realized that in refusing to take a vow man was drawn into temptation, and that to be bound by a vow was like a passage from libertinism to a real monogamous marriage. "I believe in effort, I do not want to bind myself with vows,"—is the mentality of weakness and betrays a subtle desire for the thing to be avoided. Or, where can be the difficulty in making a final decision? I vow to flee from the serpent which I know will bite me, I do not simply make an effort to flee from him. I know that mere effort may mean certain death. Mere effort means ignorance of the certain fact that the serpent is bound to kill me. The fact, therefore, that I could rest content with an effort only means that I have not yet clearly realized the necessity of definite action.

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"But supposing my views are changed in the future, how can I bind myself by a vow?" Such a doubt often deters us. But that doubt also betrays a lack of clear perception that a particular thing must be renounced. That is why Nishkulanand has sung:

"Renunciation without aversion is not lasting."

Where, therefore, the desire is gone, a vow of renunciation is the natural and inevitable fruit.

—*My Experiments With Truth*: Part III, Chap. VII.

13. VOW OF BRAHMACHARYA

AFTER full discussion and mature deliberation, I took the vow in 1906. I had not shared my thoughts with my wife until then, but only consulted her at the time of taking the vow. She had no objection. But I had great difficulty in making the final resolve. I had not the necessary strength. How was I to control my passions? The elimination of carnal relationship with one's wife seemed then a strange thing. But I launched forth with faith in the sustaining power of God.

A Sure Shield

As I look back upon the twenty years of the vow, I am filled with pleasure and wonderment. The more or less successful practice of self-control had been going on since 1901. But the freedom and joy that came to me after taking the vow had never been experinced before 1906. Before the vow, I had been open to being overcome by temptation at any moment.

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Now, the vow was a sure shield against temptation. The great potentiality of *Brahmacharya* daily became more and more patent to me.

The knowledge that a perfect observance of *Brahmacharya* means realization of *Brahman*, I did not owe to a study of the *Shastras*. It slowly grew upon me with experience. The *Shastraic* texts on the subject I read only later in life. Every day of the vow has taken me nearer the knowledge that in *Brahmacharya* lies the protection of the body, the mind and the soul. For *Brahmacharya* was now no process of hard penance, it was a matter of consolation and joy. Every day revealed a fresh beauty in it.

But if it was a matter of ever-increasing joy, let no one believe that it was an easy thing for me. Even when I am past fifty-six years, I realize how hard a thing it is. Every day I realize more and more that it is like walking on the sword's edge, and I see every moment the necessity for eternal vigilance.

Control of the Palate

Control of the palate is the first essential in the observance of the vow (of *Brahmacharya*). I found that complete control of the palate made the observance very easy, and so I now pursued my dietetic experiments not merely from the vegetarian's but also from the *Brahmachari's* point of view. As the result of these experiments, I saw that the *Brahmachari's* food should be limited, simple, spiceless, and, if possible, uncooked.

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Six years of experiment have shown me that the *Brahmachari's* ideal food is fresh fruit and nuts. The immunity from passion that I enjoyed when I lived on this food was unknown to me after I changed that diet. *Brahmacharya* needed no effort on my part in South Africa when I lived on fruits and nuts alone. It has been a matter of very great effort ever since I began to take milk. I have not the least doubt that milk diet makes the *Brahmacharya* vow difficult to observe. Let no one deduce from this that all *Brahmacharis* must give up milk. The effect on *Brahmacharya* of different kinds of food can be determined only after numerous experiments. I have yet to find a fruit-substitute for milk which is an equally good muscle-builder and easily digestible. The doctors, *vaidyas* and *hakims* have alike failed to enlighten me. Therefore, though I know milk to be partly a stimulant, I cannot, for the time being, advise anyone to give it up.

Fasting—as an Aid to Brahmacharya

As an external aid to *Brahmacharya*, fasting is as necessary as selection and restriction in diet. So overpowering are the senses that they can be kept under control only when they are completely hedged in on all sides, from above and from beneath. It is common knowledge that they are powerless without food, and so fasting undertaken with a view to control of the senses is, I have no doubt, very helpful. With some, fasting is of no avail, because assuming that

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mechanical fasting alone will make them immune, they keep their bodies without food, but feast their minds upon all sorts of delicacies, thinking all the while what they will eat and what they will drink after the fast terminates. Such fasting helps them in controlling neither palate nor lust. Fasting is useful when mind co-operates with starving body, that is to say, when it cultivates a distaste for the objects that are denied to the body. Mind is at the root of all sensuality.[1] Fasting, therefore, has a limited use, for a fasting man may continue to be swayed by passion. But it may be said that extinction of the sexual passion is, as a rule, impossible without fasting, which may be said to be indispensable for the observance of *Brahmacharya*.

Life of a Brahmachari and of One Who is Not

Many aspirants after *Brahmacharya* fail, because in the use of their other senses they want to carry on like those who are not *Brahmacharis*. Their effort is, therefore, identical with the effort to experience the bracing cold of winter in the scorching summer months. There should be a clear line between the life

1. "Self-restraint never accrues to the faint-hearted. It is the beautiful fruit of watchfulness and ceaseless effort in the form of prayer and fasting. The prayer is not vain repetition nor fasting mere starvation of the body. Prayer has to come from the heart which knows God by faith, and fasting is abstinence from evil or injurious thought, activity or food. Starvation of the body when the mind thinks of multiplicity of dishes is worse than useless."
—*Harijan*: April 10, 1937

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of a *Brahmachari* and of one who is not. The resemblance that there is between the two is only apparent. The distinction ought to be clear as daylight.

Both use their eyesight; but whereas the *Brahmachari* uses it to see the glories of God, the other uses it to see the frivolity around him.

Both use their ears; but whereas the one hears nothing but praises of God, the other feasts his ears upon ribaldry.

Both often keep late hours; but whereas the one devotes them to prayer, the other fritters them away in wild and wasteful mirth.

Both feed the inner man; but the one only to keep the temple of God in good repair, while the other gorges himself and makes the sacred vessel a stinking gutter. Thus both live as the poles apart, and the distance between them will grow and not diminish with the passage of time.

Necessity of Restraints

Brahmacharya means control of the senses in thought, word and deed. Every day I have been realizing more and more the necessity for restraints of the kind I have detailed above. There is no limit to the possibilities of renunciation, even as there is none to those of *Brahmacharya*. Such *Brahmacharya* is impossible of attainment by limited effort. For many, it must remain only as an ideal.

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An aspirant after *Brahmacharya* will always be conscious of his shortcomings, will seek out the passions lingering in the innermost recesses of his heart and will incessantly strive to get rid of them. So long as thought is not under complete control of the will, *Brahmacharya* in its fulness is absent. Involuntary thought is an affection of the mind, and curbing of thought, therefore, means curbing of the mind which is even more difficult to curb than the wind. Nevertheless, the existence of God within makes even control of the mind possible. Let no one think that it is impossible because it is difficult. It is the highest goal, and it is no wonder that the highest effort should be necessary to attain it.

God's Grace

But it was after coming to India that I realized that such *Brahmacharya* was impossible to attain by mere human effort. Until then I had been labouring under the delusion that fruit diet alone would enable me to eradicate all passions, and I had flattered myself with the belief that I had nothing more to do.

Let me make it clear that those who desire to observe *Brahmacharya* with a view to realizing God need not despair, provided their faith in God is equal to their confidence in their own effort.

"विषया विनिवर्तन्ते निराहारस्य देहिनः।
रसवर्जं रसोप्यस्य परं दृष्ट्वा निवर्तते॥"

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[The sense-objects turn away from an abstemious soul, leaving the relish behind. The relish also disappears with the realization of the Highest.[1]]

Therefore, His name and His grace are the last resources of the aspirant after *Moksha*.

—*My Experiments With Truth*: Part III, Chap. VIII.

14. FASTING AS A MEANS OF SELF-RESTRAINT

JUST about the time when I gave up milk and cereals, and started on the experiment of a fruit diet, I commenced fasting as a means of self-restraint. I had been used to fasting now and again, but for purely health reasons. That fasting was necessary for self-restraint I learnt from a friend.

Having been born in a *Vaishnava* family and of a mother who was given to keeping all sorts of hard vows, I had observed, while in India, the *Ekadashi* and other fasts; but in doing so, I had merely copied my mother and sought to please my parents.

At that time I did not understand, nor did I believe in, the efficacy of fasting. But seeing that the friend I have mentioned was observing it with benefit, and with the hope of supporting the *Brahmacharya* vow, I followed his example and began keeping the *Ekadashi* fast. As a rule, Hindus allow themselves milk and fruit on a fasting day, but such fast I had been keeping daily. So now I began complete fasting, allowing myself only water. For my part, however, I

1. *The Bhagavad Gita*: 2: 59.

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am convinced that I greatly benefited by it both physically and morally. But I know that it does not necessarily follow that fasting and similar disciplines would have the same effect for all.

Physical and Mental Fasting

Fasting can help to curb animal passion, only if it is undertaken with a view to self-restraint. Some of my friends have actually found their animal passion and palate stimulated as an after-effect of fasts. That is to say, fasting is futile unless it is accompanied by an incessant longing for self-restraint. The famous verse from the Second Chapter of the *Bhagvad Gita* is worth noting in this connection:

"For a man who is fasting his senses
Outwardly, the sense-objects disappear,
Leaving the yearning behind; but when
He has seen the Highest,
Even the yearning disappears."

Fasting and similar discipline is, therefore, one of the means to the end of self-restraint, but it is not all, and if physical fasting is not accompanied by mental fasting, it is bound to end in hypocrisy and disaster.

—*My Experiments With Truth*: P. 404.

15. TO THE ASPIRANTS AFTER BRAHMACHARYA

I MUST utter a warning for the aspirants after *Brahmacharya*. Though I have made out an intimate connection between diet and *Brahmacharya*, it is cer-

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tain that mind is the principle thing. A mind consciously unclean cannot be cleansed by fasting. Modifications in diet have no effect on it. The concupiscence of the mind cannot be rooted out except by intense self-examination, surrender to God and, lastly, grace. But there is an intimate connection between the mind and the body, and the carnal mind always lusts for delicacies and luxuries. To obviate this tendency, dietetic restrictions and fasting would appear to be necessary. The carnal mind, instead of controlling the senses, becomes their slave, and, therefore, the body always needs clean, non-stimulating foods and periodical fasting.

Those who make light of dietetic restrictions and fasting are as much in error as those who stake their all on them. My experience teaches me that, for those whose minds are working towards self-restraint, dietetic restrictions and fasting are very helpful. In fact, without their help concupiscence cannot be completely rooted out of the mind.

—*My Experiments With Truth*: P. 402.

16. CONTROL OF THE PALATE

CONTROL of the palate is very closely connected with the observance of *Brahmacharya*. I have found from experience that the observance of celibacy becomes comparatively easy, if one acquires mastery over the palate.

Food has to be taken as we take medicine, that is, without thinking whether it is palatable or other-

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wise, and only in quantities limited to the needs of the body. Just as medicine taken in too small a dose does not take effect or the full effect, and as too large a dose injures the system, so it is with food. It is, therefore, a breach of their observance to take anything for its pleasant taste. It is equally a breach to take too much of what one finds to one's taste. From this it follows, that to put salt in one's food, in order to increase or modify its flavour or in order to cure its insipidity, is a breach of this observance. But the addition is not a breach, if it is considered necessary for health to have a certain proportion of salt with food. Of course, it would be sheer hypocrisy to add salt or any other thing to our food, deluding ourselves that it is necessary for the system if, as a matter of fact, it is not.

Developing along these lines, we find we have to give up many things that we have been enjoying, as they are not needed for nutrition. And one who thus gives up a multitude of eatables will acquire self-control in the natural course of things. This subject has received such scant attention, that choice of food with this observance in view is a very difficult matter.

Parents, out of false affection, give their children a variety of foods, ruin their constitutions, and create in them artificial tastes. When they grow up they have diseased bodies and perverted tastes. The evil consequences of this early indulgence dog us at every step; we waste much money and fall an easy prey to the medicine man.

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Over-Eating Injures the Body

Most of us, instead of keeping the organs of sense under control, become their slaves. An experienced physician once observed that he had never seen a healthy man. The body is injured every time that one over-eats, and the injury can be partially repaired only by fasting.

No one need take fright at my observations, or give up the effort in despair. The taking of a vow does not mean that we are able to observe it completely from the very beginning; it does mean constant and honest effort in thought, word and deed with a view to its fulfilment. We must not practise self-deception by resorting to some make-believe. To degrade or cheapen an ideal for our convenience is to practise untruth and to lower ourselves. To understand an ideal and then to make a Herculean effort to reach it, no matter how difficult it is— this is *Purushartha,* manly endeavour. One who at all times fulfils the key observances in their perfection, has nothing else left for him to do in this world; he is *Bhagavan,* perfect man, he is a *Yogi.* We humble seekers can but put forth a slow but steady effort, which is sure to win Divine grace for us in God's good time, and all artificial tastes will then disappear with the realization of the Highest.

Need of Perpetual Vigilance

We must not be thinking of food all the twenty-four hours of the day. The only thing needful is per-

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petual vigilance, which will help us to find out very soon when we eat for self-indulgence, and when in order only to sustain the body. This being discovered, we must resolutely set our faces against mere indulgence. A common kitchen where this principle is observed is very helpful, as it relieves us from the necessity of thinking out the *menu* for each day, and provides us with acceptable food of which we may take only a limited quantity with a contented and thankful mind. The authorities of a common kitchen lighten our burden and serve as watch-dogs of our observance. They will not pamper us, they will cook only such food as helps us to keep the body a fit instrument for service. In an ideal state, the sun should be our only cook. But I know that we are far, far away from that happy state.

—*From Yeravda Mandir*: Chap. IV.

Mastery over Taste

The observance of *Brahmacharya* has been found, from experience, to be extremely difficult so long as one has not acquired mastery over taste. Control of the palate has, therefore, been placed as a principle by itself. Eating is necessary only for sustaining the body and keeping it a fit instrument for service, and must never be practised for self-indulgence. Food must, therefore, be taken like medicine under proper restraint. In pursuance of this principle, one must eschew exciting foods, such as spices and condiments.

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This principle requires abstinence from feasts or dinners which have pleasure as their object.

—*Young India*: June 14, 1928.

A man who wants to control his animal passions easily does so if he controls his palate. I fear this is one of the most difficult vows to follow.... I may say this: unless we take our minds off from this habit (slavery to the palate), and unless we shut our eyes to the tea shops and coffee shops and all these kitchens, and unless we are satisfied with foods that are necessary for the proper maintenance of our physical health, and unless we are prepared to rid ourselves of stimulating, heating and exciting condiments that we mix with our food, we will certainly not be able to control the over-abundant, unnecessary, and exciting stimulation that we may have. If we do not do that, the result naturally is, that we abuse ourselves and we abuse even the sacred trust given to us, and we become less than animals and brutes. Eating, drinking and indulging in passions we share in common with the animals; but have you ever seen a horse or a cow indulging in the abuse of the palate as we do? Do you suppose that it is a sign of civilization, a sign of real life that we should multiply our eatables so far that we do not even know where we are; and seek dishes until at last we have become absolutely mad and run after the newspaper sheets which give us advertisements about these dishes?

—*Speeches & Writings of M. Gandhi*: P. 382.

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17. WAY TO GOD-REALIZATION

THE man who is wedded to Truth and worships Truth alone, proves unfaithful to her if he applies his talents to anything else. How then can he minister to the senses? A man whose activities are wholly consecrated to the realization of Truth, which requires utter selflessness, can have no time for the selfish purpose of begetting children and running a household. Realization of Truth through self-gratification should appear a contradiction in terms.

A Votary of Ahimsa Cannot Marry

If we look at it from the standpoint of *Ahimsa* (non-violence), we find that the fulfilment of *Ahimsa* is impossible without utter selflessness. *Ahimsa* means Universal Love. If a man gives his love to one woman, or a woman to one man, what is there left for all the world besides? It simply means: 'We two first, and the devil take all the rest of them.' As a faithful wife must be prepared to sacrifice her all for the sake of her husband, and a faithful husband for the sake of his wife, it is clear that such persons cannot rise to the height of Universal Love, or look upon all mankind as kith and kin. For, they have created a boundary wall round their love. The larger their family, the farther are they from Universal Love. Hence, one who would obey the Law of *Ahimsa* cannot marry, not to speak of gratification outside the marital bond.

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The Married Should Behave as Unmarried

Then, what about people who are already married? Will they never be able to realize Truth? Can they never offer up their all at the altar of humanity? There is a way out for them. They can behave as if they were not married. Those who have enjoyed this happy condition will be able to bear me out. Many have to my knowledge successfully tried the experiment. If the married couple can think of each other as brother and sister, they are freed for universal service. The very thought that all the women in the world are his sisters, mothers or daughters, will at once ennoble a man and snap his chains. The husband and wife do not lose anything here, but only add to their resources and even to their family. Their love becomes free from the impurity of lust and so grows stronger. With the disappearance of this impurity, they can serve each other better, and the occasions for quarrelling become fewer. There are more occasions for quarrelling where the love is selfish and bounded.

If the foregoing argument is appreciated, a consideration of the physical benefits of chastity becomes a matter of secondary importance. How foolish it is intentionally to dissipate vital energy in sensual enjoyment! It is a grave misuse to fritter away for physical gratification that which is given to man and woman for the full development of their bodily and mental powers. Such misuse is the root cause of many a disease.

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Mind Should be Controlled

Brahmacharya, like all other observances, must be observed in thought, word and deed. We are told in the *Gita*, and experience will corroborate the statement, that the foolish man, who appears to control his body, but is nursing evil thoughts in his mind, makes a vain effort. It may be harmful to suppress the body, if the mind is at the same time allowed to go astray. Where the mind wanders, the body must follow sooner or later.

It is necessary here to appreciate a distinction. It is one thing to allow the mind to harbour impure thoughts; it is a different thing altogether if it strays among them in spite of ourselves. Victory will be ours in the end, if we non-co-operate with the mind in its evil wanderings.

We experience every moment of our lives, that often while the body is subject to our control the mind is not. This physical control should never be relaxed, and in addition we must put forth a constant endeavour to bring the mind under control. We can do nothing more, nothing less. If we give way to the mind, the body and the mind will pull different ways, and we shall be false to ourselves. Body and mind may be said to go together, so long as we continue to resist the approach of every evil thought.

Incomplete Conception of Brahmacharya

The observance of *Brahmacharya* has been believed to be very difficult, almost impossible. In trying to

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find a reason for this belief, we see that the term *Brahmacharya* has been taken in a narrow sense. Mere control of animal passion has been thought to be tantamount to observing *Brahmacharya*. I feel, that this conception is incomplete and wrong. *Brahmacharya* means control of all the organs of sense. He who attempts to control only one organ, and allows all the others free play, is bound to find his effort futile. To hear suggestive stories with the ears, to see suggestive sights with the eyes, to taste stimulaing food with the tongue, to touch exciting things with the hands, and then at the same time to expect to control the only remaining organ is like putting one's hands in the fire, and expecting to escape being burnt.[1] He, therefore, who is resolved to control the one must be likewise determined to control the rest. I have always felt that much harm has been done by the narrow definition of *Brahmacharya*. If we practise simultaneous self-control in all directions, the attempt will be scientific and possible of success.

Let us remember the root meaning of *Brahmacharya*. *Charya* means course of conduct; *Brahma-*

1. "It is a breach of *Brahmacharya* to hear questionable language or obscene songs. It is licentiousness of the tongue to utter foul abuse instead of reciting the name of God, and so with the other senses. He alone can be considered the true man who, having subjected his passions, becomes perfectly self-restrained. We are like a rider who cannot keep his horse under control and is quickly brought down. But one, who drawing in the reins keeps the animal under subjection, stands a fair chance of reaching his destination. Even so does a man, who can control his passions, make for the goal."
—*Young India*; Oct. 6, 1921.

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charya conduct adapted to the search of *Brahma, i.e.* Truth. From this etymological meaning arises the special meaning, *viz.*, control of all the senses. We must entirely forget the incomplete definition which restricts itself to the sexual aspect only.

—*From Yeravda Mandir*: Chap. III.

18. COMPLETE MASTERY OVER SENSES

BRAHMACHARYA means not suppression of one or more senses, but complete mastery over them all. The two states are fundamentally different. I can suppress all my senses to-day, but it may take aeons to conquer them. Conquest means *using* them as my willing slaves. I can prick the ear drum and suppress the sense of hearing by a simple, painless operation. This is worthless. I must train the ear so that it refuses to hear gossip, lewd talk, blasphemy; but it is open to the celestial music, it will hear the most distant cry for succour from thousands of miles. Saint Ramdas is said to have done so.

Then, how to use the organs of generation? By transmitting the most creative energy that we possess for creating counterparts of our flesh into creating constructive work for the whole of life, *i.e.*, for the soul. We have to rein in the animal passion and change it into celestial passion. Read here verse: 64, Chapter II of the *Gita*. The burden of the Divine Song is not "fly from the battle, but face it without attachment." Therefore, you and I and everyone of us have to stand

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unmoved in the midst of all kinds of men and women. There is no physical seclusion except temporarily for some.

—*Bapu's Letters To Mira*: P. 257.

19. PROBLEMS OF BRAHMACHARYA

THIS observance (of *Brahmacharya*) does not give rise to ever so many problems and dilemmas as *Ahimsa* does. Its meaning is generally well understood, but understanding it is one thing: practising it is quite another thing and calls forth all our powers. Many of us put forth a great effort but without making any progress. Some of us even lost ground previously won. None has reached perfection. But everyone realizes its supreme importance. My striving in this direction began before 1906 when I took the vow. There were many ups and downs. It was only after I had burnt my fingers at times that I realized the deeper meaning of *Brahmacharya*. And, then, I found that expositions made in books cannot be understood without actual experience, and wear a fresh aspect in the light of it. Even in the case of a simple machne like the spinning-wheel, it is one thing to read the directions for plying it, and it is another thing to put the directions into practice. New light dawns upon us as soon as we commence our practice. And what is true of simple tangible things like the wheel, is still more true of spiritual states.

A *Brahmachari* is one who controls his organs of sense in thought, word and deed. The meaning of this

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definition, became somewhat clear after I had kept the observance for some time, but it is not quite clear even now, for I do not claim to be a perfect *Brahmachari*, evil thoughts having been held in restraint but not eradicated. When they are eradicated, I will discover further implications of the definition.

All Organs Should be Controlled

Ordinary *Brahmacharya* is not so difficult as it is supposed to be. We have made it difficult by understanding the term in a narrow sense. Many of us play with *Brahmacharya* like fools who put their hands in the fire and still expect to escape being burnt. Very few realize that a *Brahmachari* has to control not one but all the organs of sense. He is no *Brahmachari* who thinks that mere control of animal passion is the be-all and end-all of *Brahmacharya*. No wonder if he finds it very difficult. He who attempts to control only one organ and allows the others free play, must not expect to achieve success. He might as well deliberately descend into a well and expect to keep his body dry. Those who would achieve an easy conquest of animal passion, must give up all unnecessary things which stimulate it. They must control their palate and cease to read suggestive literature and to enjoy all luxuries. I have not the shadow of a doubt that they will find *Brahmacharya* easy enough after such renunciation.

Breach of Brahmacharya

Some people think that it is not a breach of *Brahmacharya* to cast a lascivious look at one's own or

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another's wife or to touch her in the same manner; but nothing would be farther from the truth. Such behaviour constitutes a direct breach of *Brahmacharya* in the grosser sense of the term. Men and women who indulge in it deceive themselves and the world, and growing weaker day by day, make themselves easily susceptible to disease. If they stop short of a full satisfaction of desire, the credit for it is due to circumstances and not to themselves. They are bound to fall at the very first opportunity.

In *Brahmacharya,* as conceived by the *Ashram,* those who are married behave as if they were not married. Married people do well to renounce gratification outside the marital bond; theirs is a limited *Brahmacharya.* But to look upon them as *Brahmacharis* is to do violence to that glorious term.

Woman—Not the 'Door-keeper of Hell'

Woman, for a *Brahmachari,* is not the 'door-keeper of hell,' but is an incarnation of our Mother who is in Heaven. He is no *Brahmachari* at all whose mind is disturbed if he happens to see a woman, or if he has to touch her in order to render service. A *Brahmachari's* reaction to a living image and to a bronze statue is one and the same. But a man who is perturbed at the very mention of woman and who is desirous of observing *Brahmacharya,* must fly even from a figurine made of metal.

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Nothing Possible without Grace of God

I now come to a point of vital importance. We are told in the *Bhagavad Gita* (II: 59) that 'when a man starves his senses, the objects of those senses disappear from him, but not the yearning for them; the yearning, too, departs when he beholds the Supreme,' that is to say, the Truth or *Brahma* (God). The whole truth of the matter has here been set forth by the experienced Krishna. Fasting and all other forms of discipline are ineffective without the Grace of God.

What is the Vision of God ?

What is the vision of the Truth or God? It does not mean seeing something with the physical eye or witnessing a miracle. Seeing God means realization of the fact that God abides in one's heart. The yearning must persist until one has attained this realization, and will vanish upon realization. Realization is the final fruit of constant effort. The human lover sacrifices his all for his beloved, but his sacrifice is fruitless inasmuch as it is offered for the sake of momentary pleasure. But the quest of Truth calls for even greater concentration than that of the human beloved. There is joy ineffable in store for the aspirant at the end of the quest. Still, very few of us are as earnest as even the human lover.

Quest of Truth

Such being the facts of the case, what is the use of complaining that the quest of Truth is an uphill

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task? The human beloved may be at a distance of several thousand miles; God is there in the tabernacle of the human heart nearer to us than the finger-nails are to the fingers. But what is to be done with a man who wanders all over the wide world in search of treasure which, as a matter of fact, is buried under his very feet?

'Flesh-pots of Egypt'

The *Brahmacharya* observed by a self-restraining person is not something to be despised. It certainly serves to weaken the force of the yearning for the 'flesh-pots of Egypt'. One may keep fasts or adopt various other methods of mortifying the flesh, but the objects of sense must be compelled to disappear. The yearning will get itself in readiness to go as this process is on. Then the seeker will have the beatific vision, and that will be the signal for the yearning to make its final exist. The treasure supposed to be lost will be recovered. He who has not put all his strength into his effort, has no right to complain that he has not 'seen' *Brahma*. Observing *Brahmacharya* is one of the means to the end which is seeing *Brahma*. Without *Brahmacharya*, no one may expect to see Him; and without seeing Him one cannot observe *Brahmacharya* to perfection. The verse, therefore, does not rule out self-discipline, but only indicates its limitations.

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20. BRAHMACHARYA AND WOMEN

BRAHMACHARYA is such only if it persists under all conditions and in the face of every possible temptation. If a beautiful woman approaches the marble statue of a man, it will not be affected in the least. A *Brahmachari* is one who reacts in a similar case in the same way as marble does. But just as the marble statue refrains from using its eyes or ears, even so a man should avoid every occasion of sin.

The argument, that the sight and the company of women have been found to be inimical to self-restraint and are, therefore, to be avoided, is fallacious. *Brahmacharya* hardly deserves the name if it can be observed only by avoiding the company of women, even when such company is kept with a view to serve. It amounts to physical renunciation unbacked by the essential mental detachment, and lets us down in critical times. The *Gita* is right in saying (II: 59) that one's yearning for the pleasures of the world withers away, only when he has had the beatific vision. But the converse of this statement is equally true; one must not hope for realization so long as he yearns after the 'fleshpots of Egypt'. That is to say, the two things go hand in hand.

Desire Disappears on Seeing God

The yearning departs when one beholds the Supreme. Although the objects of sense have disappeared, the yearning for them has not been thoroughly up-

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rooted. Therefore, there is a possibility of desire raising its head so long as one has not seen God. After a man has seen Him, desire becomes an impossibility; indeed he ceases to be masculine and becomes sexless. He is no longer a significant figure, but is reduced to zero. In other words, his personality melts away in that of God. The idea becomes clearer if in place of the words *Param*, God, *Brahma*, we use the word *Satya* or Truth. There is no room here for self-deception. If there is any one who talks of taking the whole world for his family but harbours evil thoughts in his mind, he is a *Mithyachari* (hypocrite) in the language of the *Gita* (III: 6), while we are all along thinking of a *Satyachari* (truthful person) and how he should behave. Let us not worry about what others are doing, but only about what we can do. On seeing another's palace, we must not pull down our own humble cottage. That is to say, if we find another man moving freely among women with an innocent mind and if we feel that we are incapable of such detachment, we must bear our own limitations in mind and refrain from imitating him. If A looks upon X as a daughter and treats her accordingly, B must not imitate him if he has not the same feeling for X.

You must not cease to exercise the reasoning faculty. Reason may go wrong at times. But that does not matter. We have a right to commit mistakes. When we find them out, we shall correct them and march forward.

—*The Diary Of Mahadev Desai*; P. 80

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21. MY MEANING OF BRAHMACHARYA

MY meaning of *Brahmacharya* is this: One who never has any lustful intention; who, by constant attendance upon God, has become...capable of lying naked with naked women, however beautiful they may be, without being in any manner whatsoever sexually excited. Such a person should be incapable of lying, incapable of intending doing harm to a single man or woman in the whole world, free from anger and malice, and detached in the sense of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Such a person is a full *Brahmachari*. *Brahmachari* literally means a person who is making daily and steady progress towards God and whose every act is done in pursuance of that end and no other.

—*Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase*: Vol. I, P. 591.

22. SIGNS OF A PERFECT BRAHMACHARI

BRAHMACHARYA that cannot stand examination or shrinks from the test, when the occasion demands it, is no *Brahmacharya*. Even the sight of a nude woman will not affect a perfect *Brahmachari* and *vice versa*. Do not we see unsophisticated little boys and girls... freely mix with one another, play together and even sleep together in perfect innocence because carnal desire has not been awakened in them? In the case of a perfect *Brahmachari*, there will be the same complete, child-like innocence in spite of full sex knowledge. That state can only be said to have been established when a man can lie by the side even of a Venus, in all her

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naked beauty, without being physically or mentally disturbed. When the Gopis were stripped of their clothes by Krishna, the legend says, they showed no sign of embarrassment or sex-consciousness, but stood before the Lord in rapt devotion.

Let me again explain. There is first the innocence of the child. He has no knowledge or consciousness of sex-distinction. It is innocence rooted in ignorance. But the perfect innocence of a grown-up person, who has full knowledge and understanding of sex, is true *Brahmacharya*. Such a perfect *Brahmachari* will be proclaimed by the lustre on his face, he will be a stranger to infirmity or disease. He will manifest in full measure all marks of a *sthitaprajna* (steadfast man). And when finally he dies, it will not be as a result of sickness, his death will be a "sleep and a forgetting". He will retain his faculties unimpaired till the end, and keep on doing His work and taking His name with his last breath. These are some of the signs by which a perfect *Brahmachari* will be known.

—*Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase*: Vol. I, P. 584.

23. A FULL-FLEDGED BRAHMACHARI

BRAHMACHARYA literally means that mode of life which leads to the realization of God. That realization is impossible without practising self-restraint. Self-restraint means restraint of all the senses. But, ordinarily, *Brahmacharya* is understood to mean control over the sexual organs and prevention of seminal discharge through complete control over the sexual instinct

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and the sexual organs. This becomes natural for the man who exercises self-restraint all round. It is only when observance of *Brahmacharya* becomes natural to one, that he or she derives the greatest benefit from it. Such a person should be free from anger and kindred passions. The so-called *Brahmacharis*, that one generally comes across, behave as if their one occupation in life was the display of bad temper.

One notices that these pople disregard the ordinary rules of *Brahmacharya* and merely aim at and expect to prevent seminal discharges. They fail to achieve their object. Some of them become almost insane, while others betray a sickly appearance. They are unable to prevent the discharge and if they succeed in restraining themselves from sexual intercourse, they think they have attained all that was needed. Now mere abstention from sexual intercourse cannot be termed *Brahmacharya*. So long as the desire for intercourse is there, one *cannot* be said to have attained *Brahmacharya*.

Only he who has burnt away the sexual desire in its entirety, may be said to have attained control over his sexual organ. The absence of seminal discharges is a straightforward result of *Brahmacharya*, but it is not all. There is something very striking about a full-fledged *Brahmachari*. His speech, his thought, and his actions—all bespeak possession of vital force. Such *Brahmachari* does not flee from company of women. He may not hanker after it, nor may he avoid it even when it means rendering of necessary service. For him,

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the distinction between men and women almost disappears.

No One Should Distort My Words

No one should distort my words to use them as an argument in favour of licentiousness. What I mean to say is that a man whose sexual desire has been burnt up, ceases to make a distinction between men and women. It must be so. His conception of beauty alters. He will not look at the external form. He or she, whose character is beautiful, will be beautiful in his eyes. Therefore, the sight of a woman called beautiful will not ruffle or excite him. Even his sexual organs will begin to look different. In other words, such a man has so controlled his sexual instinct that he never gets erections. He does not become impotent for lack of the necessary secretions of sexual glands. But these secretions in his case are sublimated into a vital force pervading his whole being.

It is said that an impotent man is not free from the sexual desire. Some of my correspondents belonging to this group tell me that they desire erection, but they fail to get it and yet have seminal discharges. Such men have either become impotent or are on the way to become so for loss of the necessary secretions. This is a pitiable state. But the cultivated impotency of the man, whose sexual desire has been burnt up and whose sexual secretions are being converted into vital force, is wholly different. It is to be desired by every-

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body. It is true that such a *Brahmachari* is rare to find.

No Relaxation of Effort

I took the vow of *Brahmacharya* in 1906. In other words, my effort to become a perfect *Brahmachari* started 36 years ago. I cannot say I have attained the full *Brahmacharya* of my definition; but, in my opinion, I have made substantial progress towards it. If God wills it, I might attain even perfection in this life. Anyway, there is no relaxation of effort, nor is there any despondence in me. I do not consider thirty-six years too long a period for the effort. The richer the prize, the richer must the effort be. Meanwhile, my ideas regarding necessity for *Brahmacharya* have become stronger. Some of my experiments have not reached a stage when they might be placed before the public with advantage. I hope to do so some day if they succeed to my satisfaction. Success might make the attainment of *Brahmacharya* comparatively easier.

But the *Brahmacharya* on which I wish to lay emphasis in this chapter is limited to the conservation of sexual secretions. The glorious fruit of perfect *Brahmacharya* is not to be had from the observance of this limited *Brahmacharya*. But no one can reach perfect *Brahmacharya* without reaching the limited variety.

And maintenance of perfect health should be considered almost an utter impossibility without *Brahmacharya* leading to the conservation of the sexual secre-

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tions. To countenance wastage of a secretion which has the power of creating another human being is, to say the least, an indication of gross ignorance.

—*Key to Health*: Pp. 43-46.

24. CONSERVATION OF VITAL ENERGY

A FIRM grasp of the fact that semen is meant to be used only for procreation and not for self-indulgence, leaves no room whatsoever for indulging in animal passion. Assimilation of the knowledge that the vital fluid is never meant for waste, should restrain men and women from becoming crazy over sexual intercourse. Marriage will then come to have a different significance and the way it is treated at present will appear disgusting.

Place of Sex in Marriage

Marriage ought to signify a union of hearts between the two partners. A married couple is worthy of being considered *Brahmacharis*, if they never think of sexual intercourse except for the purposes of procreation. Such an intercourse is not possible unless both parties desire it. It will never be resorted to in order to satisfy passion without the desire for a child. After intercourse, which has been performed as a matter of duty, the desire to repeat the process should never arise.

Not a Copy-Book Wisdom

What I am saying may not be taken as copy-book wisdom. The reader should know that I am writing

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this after a long personal experience. I know that what I am writing is contrary to the common practice. But in order to make progress, we have often to go beyond the limits of common experience. Great discoveries have been possible only as a result of challenging the common experience or commonly held beliefs. The invention of the simple match-stick was a challenge to the common experience, and the discovery of electricity confounded all pre-conceived notions.

Discovery of the Law of Restraint

What is true of physical things is equally true of things spiritual. In the early days, there was no such thing as marriage. Men and women, as in the case of animals, mated promiscuously. Self-restraint was unknown. Some advanced men went beyond the rut of common practice and discovered the Law of Self-Restraint. Therefore, when I say it is the duty of every man and woman to take the marital relations to the state indicated by me, it is not to be dismissed as utterly impracticable. If human life is moulded, as it ought to be, conservation of the vital fluid can become a natural thing for everyone.

The Real Key to Health

The sexual glands are all the time secreting the semen. This secretion should be utilized for enhancing one's mental, physical and spiritual energy. He who would learn to utilize it thus, will find that he requires very little food to keep his body in a fit condi-

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tion. And yet he will be as capable as any of undertaking physical labour. Mental exertion will not tire him easily, nor will he show the ordinary signs of old age. Just as a ripe fruit or an old leaf falls off naturally, so will such a *Brahmachari*, when his time comes, pass away with all his faculties intact.[1] Although with the passage of time the effects of the natural wear and tear must be manifest in his body, his intellect, instead of showing signs of decay, should show progressive clarity. If all this is correct, the real key to health lies in the conservation of vital energy.

—*Key To Health*: P. 46.

25. ACT OF GENERATION

I THINK it is the height of ignorance to believe that the sexual act is an independent function necessary like sleeping or eating. The world depends for its existence on the act of generation, and as the world is the playground of God and a reflection of His glory, the act of generation should be controlled for the ordered growth of the world. He who realizes this, will control his lust at any cost, equip himself with the knowledge necessary for the physical, mental and spi-

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1. "A person having no passions has also, of course, to die. But he quietly drops away like a ripe fruit. I hope and desire that I should drop out like that. I still entertain such a hope and desire. But who knows? Passions I still have and they play their part. When one is completely free from them, one attains the perfect state."

—*To Ashram Sisters*: P. 21.

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ritual well-being of his progeny, and give the benefit of that knowledge to posterity.

—*My Experiments With Truth*: Part III, Chap. VI.

26. RULES FOR CONSERVATION OF VITAL FORCE

I GIVE here the rules for the conservation of vital force as I know them:

1. Sexual desire has its root in one's thought. Therefore, complete control over thought is necessary. The way to achieve it is this: Never let your mind remain idle. Keep it filled with good and useful ideas. In other words, keep thinking of whatever duty you have on hand. There need be no worry about it, but think out how you can become an expert in your department and then put your thoughts into action. There should be no waste of thought.

Japa (reptition of God's name) is a great support when idle thoughts haunt you. Contemplate God in the form you have pictured Him, unless you know Him as formless. While *Japa* is going on, no other thought should be allowed to enter one's mind. This is the ideal state. But if one cannot reach it and all sorts of uninvited thoughts invade one's mind, one should not become disheartened. *Nama-Japa* should be continued faithfully and in the confidence that ultimate victory is bound to follow.

Avoid Erotic Literature

2. As with our thoughts, so with our reading and talking. These should be healthy and clean. Erotic

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literature should be avoided. Idle, indecent talk leads to indecent action. It is obvious that one who does not wish to feed his animal passions, will avoid occupations which tend to induce them.

Keep Body Healthily Occupied

3. Like the mind, the body must also be kept well and usefully occupied, so that the fatigue of the day may lead to refreshing, dreamless sleep. As far as possible, work should be in the open. Those who, for some reason or the other, cannot undertake physical labour, should make it a point to take regular exercise. In my opinion, a brisk walk in the open is the best form of exercise. During the walk, the mouth should be closed and breathing should be done through the nose. Sitting or walking, the body must be held erect. To sit or stand otherwise is a sign of laziness, and laziness is the enemy of self-restraint. *Yogic* exercises—*Asans*—are also useful. This much I can say from my personal experience that one who keeps his hands and feet, eyes and ears, healthily occupied, does not have much difficulty in controlling the animal appetite. Everyone can test this for himself.

A Man Becomes What He Eats

4. A Sanskrit text says that a man becomes what he eats. A glutton who exercises no restraint in eating, is a slave to his animal passions. One who has not been able to control his palate, will never be able to control the other senses. If this is true, it is clear

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that one should take just enough food for the requirements of the body and no more. The diet should be healthy and well-balanced. The body was never meant to be treated as a refuse-bin, holding the foods that the palate demands. Food is meant to sustain the body. His body has been given to man as a means of self-realization. Self-realization means realization of God. A person who has made this realization the object of his or her life, will never become a slave to the animal passion.

How Man Should Look Upon Woman

5. Man should look upon every woman as his mother, sister or daughter. No one ever entertains impure thoughts with regard to his mother, sister or daughter. Similarly, woman should look upon every man as her father, brother or son.

Anyone who observes these rules should find it easy to overcome what has been called the greatest of all passions. A person who has a real desire for *Brahmacharya*, will not give up the effort because he or she regards the observance of these rules as impossible or at least within the reach of one in a million. The effort is a joy in itself. To put it in another way, the joy of possessing perfect health is not to be compared with any other, and perfect health is unattainable by slaves. Slavery of one's animality is perhaps the worst of all.

—*Key to Health*: P. 49.

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27. WHAT BRAHMACHARYA MEANS

BRAHMACHARYA does not mean mere physical self-control. It means much more. It means complete control over all the senses. Thus, an impure thought is a breach of *Brahmacharya;* so is anger. All power comes from the preservation and sublimation of the vitality that is responsible for creation of life. If the vitality is husbanded instead of being dissipated, it is transmuted into creative energy of the highest order.

Rambling Thoughts Dissipate Vitality

This vitality is continuously and even unconsciously dissipated by evil, or even rambling, disorderly, unwanted thoughts. And since thought is the root of all speech and action, the quality of the latter corresponds to that of the former. Hence, perfectly controlled thought is itself power of the highest potency and can become self-acting. That seems to me to be the meaning of the silent prayer of the heart. If man is after the image of God, he has but to will a thing in the limited sphere allotted to him and it becomes. Such power is impossible in one who dissipates his energy in any way whatsoever, even as steam kept in a leaky pipe yields no power. The sexual act, divorced from the deliberate purpose of generation, is a typical and gross form of dissipation and has, therefore, been specially and rightly chosen for condemnation. But in one, who has to organize vast masses of mankind for non-violent action, the full control described by me has to be attempted and virtually achieved.

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Not Possible without God's Grace

This control is unattainable save by the grace of God. There is a verse in the Second Chapter of the *Gita* which freely rendered means: "Sense-effects remain in abeyance whilst one is fasting or whilst the particular sense is starved, but the hankering does not cease except when one sees God face to face." This control is not mechanical or temporary. Once attained, it is never lost. In that state, vital energy is stored up without any chance of escaping by the innumerable outlets.

Brahmacharya and Women

It has been said that such *Brahmacharya,* if it is at all attainable, can be so only by cave-dwellers. A *Brahmachari*, it is said, should never see, much less touch, a woman. Doubtless a *Brahmachari* may not think of, speak of, see or touch a woman *lustfully*. But the prohibition one finds in books on *Brahmacharya* is mentioned without the important adverb. The reason for the omission seems to be that man is no impartial judge in such matters and, therefore, cannot say when he is or is not affected by such contacts. Cupid's visitations are often unperceivable. Difficult though, therefore, *Brahmacharya* is of observance when one freely mixes with the world, it is not of much value of it is attainable only by retirement from the world.

My Experience of Brahmacharya

Any way, I have practised *Brahmacharya* for over thirty years with considerable success, though living in

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the midst of activities. After the decision to lead the life of a *Brahmachari,* there was little change in my outward practice, except with my wife. In the course of my work among the Indians in South Africa, I mixed freely with women. There was hardly an Indian woman in the Transvaal and Natal whom I did not know. They were so many sisters and daughters to me. My *Brahmacharya* was not derived from books. I evolved my own rules for my guidance and that of those who, at my invitation, had joined me in the experiment. If I have not followed the prescribed restrictions, much less have I accepted the description found even in religious literature of woman as the source of all evil and temptation. Owing as I do all the good there may be in me to my mother, I have looked upon woman never as an object for satisfaction of sexual desire, but always with the veneration due to my own mother. Man is the tempter and aggressor. It is not woman whose touch defiles man, but he is often himself too impure to touch her.

Nature of Limitations

But recently a doubt has seized me as to the nature of the limitations that a *Brahmachari* or *Brahmacharini* should put upon himself or herself regarding contacts with the opposite sex. I have set limitations which do not satisfy me. What they should be, I do not know. I am experimenting. I have never claimed to have been a perfect *Brahmachari* of my definition. I have not acquired that control over my thoughts that

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I need for my researches in non-violence. If my non-violence is to be contagious and infectious, I must acquire greater control over my thoughts.

—*Harijan*: July 23, 1938.

28. HOW TO ACQUIRE SELF-RESTRAINT

FROM what, however, I have discovered from the letters that regularly come to me from inquirers, I would like to issue this definite warning: Those who believe in self-restraint must not become hypochondriacs. The letters that come to me show that many correspondents brood over their ill-success in the exercise of self-restraint. Like everything else that is good, self-restraint too requires an inexhaustible store of patience. There is absolutely no reason to despond, and there must be no brooding. There should be no conscious effort to drive away evil thoughts. That process is itself a kind of indulgence.

Non-Resistance—The Best Remedy

The best prescription perhaps is non-resistance, *i.e.*, ignoring the existence of evil thoughts and a continuous pre-occupation with duties that lie in front of one. This presupposes the existence of some kind of all-absorbing service, requiring the concentration of mind, soul and body upon it. "Idle hands some mischief still will ever find to do," is never so applicable as in this case. Evil thoughts, much more evil deeds, are impossible when we are thus preoccupied. Strenuous labour in accordance with one's physical capa-

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city is, therefore, absolutely necessary for those who will obey the Law of Self-Restraint, which is indispensable for individual as well as universal progress.

—*Self-Restraint V. Self-Indulgence*: P. V.

29. HOW TO CONTROL EVIL THOUGHTS

COMPLETE extinction of impure thought is impossible without ceaseless penance. There is only one way to achieve this. The moment an impure thought arises, confront it with a pure one. This is possible only with God's grace, and God's grace comes through ceaseless communion with Him and complete self-surrender. This communion may in the beginning be just a lip repetition of His name, even disturbed by impure thoughts. But ultimately what is on the lips will possess the heart.

Let not the Senses Wander

And there is another thing to bear in mind. The mind may wander, but let not the senses wander with it. If the senses wander where the mind takes them, one is done for. But he who keeps control of the physical senses will some day be able to bring impure thoughts under control.

Impure thoughts need not dismay you. We are monarchs of the Domain of Effort. God is sole Monarch of the Domain of Result.... You know what to do to create a pure atmosphere about you. Spare diet, sight fixed on the earth below and impatience with one

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self to the extent of plucking the eye out if 'it offends thee'.

—*Harijan*: Feb. 22, 1942.

30. 'THE THINGS ETERNAL'

THE world seems to be running after things of transitory value. It has no time for the other. And yet, when one thinks a little deeper, it becomes clear that it is the things eternal that count in the end. ...One such is *Brahmacharya.*

What is *Brahmacharya?* It is the way of life which leads us to *Brahma* (God). It includes full control over the process of reproduction. The control must be in thought, word and deed. If the thought is not under control, the other two have no value. There is a saying in Hindustani: "He whose heart is pure, has the all purifying waters of the Ganges in his house." For one whose thought is under control, the other is mere child's play.

Brahmachari of My Conception

The *Brahmachari* of my conception will be healthy and will easily live long. He will not even suffer from so much as a headache. Mental and physical work will not cause fatigue. He is ever bright, never slothful. Outward neatness will be an exact reflection of the inner. He will exhibit all the attributes of the steadfast one described in the *Gita.* It need cause no worry if not one person is met with answering the description.

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The Eleven Disciplines

Is it strange that one who is able completely to conserve and sublimate the vital fluid which has the potentiality of creating human beings, should exhibit all the attributes described above? Who can measure the creative strength of such sublimation, one drop of which has the potentiality of bringing into being a human life? Patanjali has described five disciplines. It is not possible to isolate any one of these and practise it. It may be posited in the case of Truth, because it really includes the other four. And for this age, the five have been expanded into eleven. Acharya Vinoba has put them in the form of a Marathi verse: They are Non-violence, Truth, Non-stealing, *Brahmacharya,* Non-possession, Bread labour, Control of the Palate, Fearlessness, Equal Regard for All Religions, *Swadeshi and* Removal of Untouchability.

All these can be derived from Truth. But life is complex. It is not possible to enunciate one grand principle and leave the rest to follow of itself. Even when we know a proposition, its corollaries have to be worked out.

All Disciplines are of Equal Importance

It is well to bear in mind that all the disciplines are of equal importance. If one is broken, all are. There seems to be a popular belief amongst us that breach of Truth or Non-violence is pardonable. Non-stealing and Non-possession are rarely mentioned. We hardly re-

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cognize the necessity of observing them. But a fancied breach of *Brahmacharya* excites wrath and worse. There must be something seriously wrong with a society in which values are exaggerated and under estimated. Moreover, to use the word *Brahmacharya* in a narrow sense is to detract from its value. Such detraction increases the difficulty of proper observance. When it is isolated, even the elementary observance becomes difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, it is essential that all the disciplines should be taken as one. This enables one to realize the full meaning and significance of *Brahmacharya*.

—*Harijan*: June 8, 1947.

31. WALLS OF PROTECTION

LET us ask ourselves what wall should be erected to protect *Brahmacharya*. The answer seems clear. It is not *Brahmacharya* that needs walls of protection. To say this is easy enough and sounds sweet. But it is difficult to understand the import of the statement and more so to act accordingly.

It is true that he who has attained perfect *Brahmacharya*, does not stand in need of protecting walls. But the aspirant undoubtedly needs them, even as a young mango plant has need of a strong fence round it. A child goes from its mother's lap to the cradle and from the cradle to the push-cart—till he becmes a man who has learnt to walk without aid. To cling to the aid when it is needless, is surely harmful.

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Brahmacharya is one out of the eleven observances. It follows, therefore, that the real aid to *Brahmacharya* are the remaining ten observances. The difference between them and the walls of protection is that the latter are temporary, the former permanent. They are an integral part of *Brahmacharya*.

A Mental Condition

Brahmacharya is a mental condition. The outward behaviour of a man is at once the sign and proof of the inner state. He who has killed the sexual urge in him, will never be guilty of it in any shape or form. However attractive a woman may be, her attraction will produce no effect on the man without the urge. The same rule applies to woman. But he or she who has not conquered lust, should not turn the eyes even towards a sister or a brother or a daughter or a son. This advice I have given to friends who have profited by it.

My Personal Experience

As for myself, I have to admit with great shame that while the sight of women had ceased to rouse any sexual urge in me in South Africa, in the early days of my return to India past recollections roused the urge against which I had to battle fairly hard. The same is true of the vague fear which is so unbecoming in man.

I was cowardly by nature. I was frightened to sleep in the dark. To sleep alone in a room was an act of bravery for me. I hope I have lost that coward-

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liness. Yet, I do not know what would be my state if I lost my way and had to wander alone in a thick forest on a dark night, and if I were to forget that God was ever with me. If this childhood's fear has not completely gone from me, it would be certainly more difficult for me to be fearless in a lonely jungle than to control the sex urge.

Rules for Would-Be Brahmachari

There are certain rules laid down in India for the would-be *Brahmachari*. Thus, he may not live among women, animals and eunuchs; he may not teach a woman only or even a group; he may not sit on the same mat as a woman; he may not look at any part of a woman's body; he may not take milk, curds, *ghee* or any fatty substance, nor indulge in baths and oily massage. I read about these when I was in South Africa. There I came in touch with some men and women who, while they observed *Brahmacharya*, never knew that any of the above-named restraints were necessary. Nor did I observe them and I was none the worse for the non-observance. I did give up milk, *ghee* and other animal substances, but for different reasons. I failed in this attempt after two or three years after my return to India. But if to-day I could find any effective vegetable substitute for milk and *ghee*, I would gladly renounce all animal products. But this is another story.

A Perfect Brahmachari

A perfect *Brahmachari* never loses his vital fluid. On the contrary, he is able to increase it day by day

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and, what is more, he conserves it; he will, therefore, never become old in the accepted sense and his intellect will never be dimmed.

It appears to me that even the true aspirant does not need the above-mentioned restraints. *Brahmacharya* is not a virtue that can be cultivated by outward restraint. He who runs away from a necessary contact with a woman, does not understand the full meaning of *Brahmacharya*.

Let not the reader imagine for one moment that what I have written is to serve as the slightest encouragement to life without the law of real restraint. Nor is there room in any honest attempt for hypocrisy.

Self-indulgence and hypocrisy are sins to be avoided.

The true *Brahmachari* will shun false restraints. He must create his own fences according to his limitations, breaking them down when he feels that they are unnecessary. The first thing is to know what true *Brahmacharyas* is, then to realize its value and, lastly, to try to cultivate this priceless virtue. I hold that true service of the country demands this observance.

—*Harijan*: June 15, 1947.

32. MY RESEARCH IN BRAHMACHARYA

NO moral progress or reform is possible if one is not prepared to get out of the rut of arthodox tradition. By allowing ourselves to be cribbed by cast-iron social conventions, we have lost. The orthodox

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conception of the nine-fold wall of protection in regard to *Brahmacharya* is, in my opinion, inadequate and defective. I have never accepted it for myself. In my opinion, even *striving* after *true Brahmacharya* is not possible by keeping behind it.

For 20 years, I was in the closest touch with the West in South Africa. I have known the writings on sex by eminent writers like Havelock Ellis and Bertrand Russell, and their theories. They are all thinkers of eminence, integrity and experience. They have suffered for their convictions and for giving expression to the same. While totally repudiating institutions like marriage etc., and the current code of morals—and there I disagree with them—they are firm believers in the possibility and desirability of purity in life independently of those institutions and usages. I have come across men and women in the West who lead a pure life, although they do not accept or observe the current usages and social conventions. My research runs somewhat in that direction.

A Reformer Cannot Afford to Wait

If you admit the necessity and desirability of reform, of discarding the old, wherever necessary, and building a new system of ethics and morals suited to the present age, then the question of seeking the permission of others or convincing them does not arise. A reformer cannot afford to wait till others are converted; he must take the lead and venture forth alone even in the teeth of universal opposition. I want to test, en-

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large and revise the current definition of *Brahmacharya* in the light of my observation, study and experience. Therefore, whenever an opportunity presents itself, I do not evade it or run away from it. On the contrary, I deem it my duty—*dharma*—to meet it squarely in the face and find out where it leads to and where I stand. To avoid the contact of a woman, or run away from it out of fear, I regard as unbecoming of an aspirant after true *Brahmacharya*. I have never tried to cultivate or seek sex contact for carnal satisfaction. I do not claim to have completely eradicated the sex feeling in me. But it is my claim that I can keep it under control.

—*Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase*: Vol. I, P. 588.

33. OBSERVANCE OF RESTRAINTS

ALTHOUGH I believe that for the sake of social good one should abandon many things, I feel that there is room for wise discretion even in the observance of such restraints. Theoretically speaking, there is nothing harmful in both the sexes going about in utter nakedness. It is said that in their state of innocence, Adam and Eve had not even a fig-leaf to cover their nakedness. But immediately they became aware of their nakedness, they began to cover themselves and were hurled from Paradise. Are we not in that inherited fallen state? If we were to forget that, we would surely harm ourselves. I consider this an instance of observing prohibition for the sake of social good.

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Contrariwise, for the very sake of society it was just and proper to give up untouchability, although it was fashionable among people of accepted merit. Marriage of nine-year-old girls used to be defended on the ground of social good. So was prohibition against crossing the seas. Such instances can be multiplied. Every custom has to be examined on its merits.

Restraints must not be such as to perpetuate sex-consciousness. In most of our daiiy transactions, such consciousness should be absent. The only ocassion when it is called for, so far as I am aware, is when one feels sexually disburbed. If the consciousness afflicted us the whole day long, we should be considered to have a corrput mind, and such a mind is not conducive to social welfare.

—*Harijan*: July 27, 1947.

34. WHO AND WHERE IS GOD?

I HAVE defined *Brahmacharya* as that correct way of life which leads to *Brahma, i.e.* God. Straightaway the question arises: "What or who is God?" If man knew the answer, it would enable him to find the path that leads to Him.

God is Not a Person

God is not a person. To affirm that He descends to earth every now and again in the form of a human being is a partial truth, which merely signifies that such a person lives near to God. Inasmuch as God is omni-

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present, He dwells within every human being and all may, therefore, be said to be incarnations of Him. But this leads us nowhere. Rama, Krishna, etc. are called incarnations of God because we attribute divine qualities to them. In truth, they are creations of man's imagination. Whether they actually lived or not, does not affect the picture of them in men's minds. The Rama and Krishna of history often present difficulties which have to be overcome by all manner of arguments.

God is the Force

The truth is that God is the Force. He is the essence of life. He is pure and undefiled consciousness. He is eternal. And yet, strangely enough, all are not able to derive either benefit from or shelter in the All-Pervading Living Presence.

Electricity is a powerful force. Not all can benefit from it. It can only be produced by following certain laws. It is a lifeless force. Man can utilize it if he labours hard enough to acquire the knowledge of its laws.

The Living Force which we call God can similarly be found if we know and follow His law leading to the discovery of Him in us. But it is self-evident that to find out God's law requires far harder labour. The law may, in one word, be termed *Brahmacharya*. The straight way to cultivate *Brahmacharya* is *Ramanama*. I can say this from experience. Devotees and sages like Tulsidas have shown us this royal path. . . .He who

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can make full use of it can show powerful results with very little outside effort.

Beauty and Power of Ramanama

Following this line of thought, I can say with conviction that the orthodox aids to *Brahmacharya* pale into insignificance before *Ramanama,* when this name is enthroned in the heart. Then and then only do we realize its transcendent beauty and power. In the vigilant search for this matchless and unfailing weapon, we find that it is hard to differentiate between ends and means. Thus, the eleven rules of conduct are the means to enable us to reach God. Of the eleven rules, Truth is the means and God, called *Rama,* is the end. Is it not equally true that *Ramanama* is the means and Truth is the end?

But let me revert to the original point. The accepted meaning of *Brahmacharya* is the attainment by man of complete control over the sex organ. The golden means to attain that end is *Ramanama.* For proving the efficacy of *Ramanama,* there are undoubted rules. It will be worthwhile to recount them.

—*Harijan*: June 22, 1947.

35. TOWARDS REALIZATION

WHAT is the mark of him who has *Rama* enthroned in his heart? If we do not know this, there is danger of *Ramanama* being much misinterpreted. Some misinterpretation is already in existence. Many sport rosa-

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ries and put the sacred mark on the forehead and vainly babble His name. It may well be asked whether I am not adding to the current hypocrisy by continued insistence on *Ramanama*. I must not be deterred by such forebodings. Silence thus brought about is harmful. The living Voice of Silence needs to be backed by prolonged, heartfelt practice. In the absence of such natural silence, we must try to know the marks of him who has *Rama* in his heart.

True Devotee of God

A devotee of *Rama* may be said to be the same as the steadfast one (*Sthitaprajnya*) of the *Gita*. If one goes a little deeper, it will be seen that a true devotee of God faithfully obeys the five elemental forces of Nature. If he so obeys, he will not fall ill. If perchance he does, he will cure himself with the aid of the elementals. It is not for the Dweller in the body to get the body cured anyhow—he who believes that he is nothing but body will naturally wander to the ends of the earth in order to cure the body of its ills. But he who realizes that the soul is something apart from, though in the body, that it is imperishable in contrast to the perishable body, will not be perturbed nor mourn if the elementals fail. On the contrary, he will welcome death as a friend. He will become his own healer instead of seeking for medical men. He will live in the consciousness of the soul within and look to the care, first and last, of the Indweller.

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Such a man will take God's name with every breath. His *Rama* will be awake even whilst the body is asleep. *Rama* will always be with him in whatever he does. The real death for such a devoted man will be the loss of this sacred companionship.

The Five Elementals

As an aid to keeping his *Rama* with him, he will take what the five elementals have to give him. That is to say he will employ the simplest and easiest way of deriving all the benefit he can from Earth, Air, Water, Sunlight and Ether. This aid is not complementary to *Ramanama*. It is but a means of its realization. *Ramanama* does not, in fact, require any aid. But to claim belief in *Ramanama* and at the same time to run to doctors, do not go hand in hand.

An Alchemy of Ramanama

A friend versed in religious lore, who read my remarks on *Ramanama* sometime ago, wrote to say that *Ramanama* is an alchemy such as can transform the body. The conservation of the vital energy has been likened to accumulated wealth, but it is in the power of *Ramanama* alone to make it a running stream of ever-increasing spiritual strength, ultimately making a fall impossible.

Just as the body cannot exist without blood, so the soul needs the matchless and pure strength of faith. This strength can renovate the weakness of all man's physical organs. That is why it is said that when

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Ramanama is enshrined in the heart, it means the re-birth of man. This law applies to the young, the old, man and woman alike.

This belief is to be found in the West, too, Christian sciences give a glimpse of it.

India needs no outside support for a belief which has been handed down to her people from time immemorial.

—*Harijan*: June 29, 1947.

36. HOW TO ERADICATE EVIL THOUGHTS

A FRIEND writes:

> "I am miserable. I am haunted by carnal thoughts even whilst I am in my office, on the road, by night and day, whilst reading and working, even whilst I am praying. How is a wandering mind to be controlled? How is one to learn to look upon every woman as one's mother? How is the eye to radiate forth purest love? How can evil thoughts be eradicated? I have before me your article on *Brahamacharya* (written years ago), but it has failed to help me."

The condition is heart-rending. Many suffer from it. But so long as the mind is engaged in a perpetual struggle against evil thoughts, there is no reason to despair. When the eye offends, it should be closed. When the ears offend, they should be stopped. It is best always to walk with down-cast eyes. They will

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then have no occasion to go astray. All haunts of filthy talk or unclean music should be avoided.

Control of the Palate

There should be full control of the palate. I know that he who has not mastered his palate, cannot master the carnal desire. It is very difficult, I know, to master the palate. But mastery of the palate means automatic mastery of the other sense. One of the rules for control of the palate is to abjure completely or, as much as possible, all condiments. A more difficult rule is to cultivate the feeling that the food we eat is to sustain the body, never to satisfy the palate. We take air not for the pleasure of it, but to breathe. We drink water to quench our thirst; and so should we take food to satisfy our hunger. But from childhood upwards, we are brought up to a different habit. Our parents make us cultivate all sorts of tastes, not with a view to our nourishment, but for indulging their affection for us. We thus go spoiled. We have, therefore, to struggle against the results of our own upbringing.

A Golden Rule

There is, however, a golden rule for gaining control of the carnal desire. It is the repetition of the divine word *Rama* or such other *Mantra*. The *Dwadash Mantra* (ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय:) also serves the same purpose. Everyone must select the *Mantra* after his heart. I have suggested the word *Rama* because I was brought up to repeat it in my childhood,

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and I have ever got strength and sustenance out of it. Whichever *Mantra* is selected, one should be identified with it whilst repeating it. I have not the least doubt of ultimate success as a result of repetition of some such *Mantra* in complete faith, even though other thoughts distract the mind. The *Mantra* will be the light of one's life and will keep one from all distress. Such holy *Mantras* should obviously never be used for material ends. If their use is strictly restricted to the preservation of morals, the results attained will be startling. Of course, a mere repetition of such a *Mantra* parrot-wise would be of no avail. One should throw his whole soul into it. The parrot repeats it like a machine. We should repeat it with a view to preventing the approach of unwelcome thoughts and with full faith in the efficacy of the *Mantra* to that end.

—*Young India*: June 5, 1924.

37. LUSTING WITH THE EYE

Q. I am a poor man employed in a mill. I am in a great fix. Whenever I go out, the sight of a fair face overwhelms me. I lose all self-control. I sometimes fear that I might be betrayed into indecorous behaviour. I once thought of committing suicide. But my good wife saved me. She suggested that I should take her with me whenever I stirred out of the house. The plan has worked, but it is not always practicable. In desperation I often think that I should pluck out my offending eyes. But the consideration for my wife has deterred me. You are a man of God. Can't you suggest a remedy?

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A. You are honest and frank. You should know that there are many people in the same plight as you are. This lusting with the eye is a common disease. It is on the increase. It has even attained a kind of respectability. This, however, should be no consolation to you. You have a brave wife. You dare not be unfaithful to her. And lusting after another woman is the height of unfaithfulness. It reduces marriage to a mockery. You should resolutely fight against the enemy. Treasure the thought that all other women are like blood-sisters to you.

Give up Lewd Literature and Cinemas

Give up the lewd literature, cinemas and lewd pictures that disfigure the press. Walk with your eyes fixed to the earth and, whilst you are doing so, pray to the God within that He may cleanse your heart, and believe that He will deliver you from the curse. If necessary, wear thicky smoked glasses. You will find in them a first class external aid. There is really nothing to admire in the big cities with their oppressive hugeness and congestion and the same noises, and the same faces day in and day out. If we were not victims of the mighty force of inertia, our senses would sicken over the repetition of the same ugly phenomenon.

Do a Bit of Star-Gazing

In the day time bury yourself in the duty before you, and at night do a little bit of star-gazing with the

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aid of a simple astronomical guide, and you will have before your eyes a spectacle which no cinema in the world can provide; and, it may be, you will one day find God peeping through the myraids of stars, and, if you attune yourself to the divine nightly manifestation, you will hear the soft and soothing music of the spheres. Try this every night and your eyes will act right and your heart will be sound. May God bless you!

—*Harijan*: Feb. 3, 1940.

38. VOWS AND WILL POWER

Q. I am genuine seeker after *Brahmacharya*. But, in spite of all my prayerful effort, I am sinking deeper and deeper into self-indulgence. I cannot blame my partner for it. My circumstances do not permit me to enforce the rule about segregation.

You advocate and believe in the efficacy of vows. You have said that "for the weak in mind and soul, vows are like tonics." But how will you administer this tonic to a case like mine, who has not the strength of will to carry out the vow he has taken? Had I such a strong will, the necessity for taking vows would not have arisen.

A. Let me bluntly tell you that I do not believe in your genuineness, not that you are wilfully lying. You are unconsciously ungenuine. If you are genuine, you will at least observe the rules of the game. You give up your case when you say you cannot segregate yourself from your wife for want of room. I have

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never heard such an excuse. If you take the vow, you must at least produce the necessary atmosphere around you for its observance. Everyone who has successfully carried out the vow, has invariably observed this first condition. If you are living in only one room, you should go elsewhere or send away your wife or have a relative to sleep in the same room. The question is how far you are determined.

It may be that you want to observe *Brahmacharya*, because you have read much about it and would like to be classed among *Brahmacharis*. I know many such young men. If that is your case, you should not make the attempt. One must have a burning desire to live that life. If you have it, you will adopt the measures that all aspirants have invariably adopted. You are then bound to succeed.

—*Harijan*: June 29, 1940.

39. A PERPLEXITY

"I have developed a curious mentality about the relations between men and women. I believe in certain checks upon these. Yet my condition is very much like that of a man suspended in mid-air. I often feel that if these relations were more natural than they are, probably there would be less sinfulness. Yet something within me tells me that every touch, be it ever so superficial, is bound to lead to the eruption of animal passion. When one examines the court cases here even about brother and sister or even father and daughter, the beginning seems to have been quite innocent. In my opinion, the glow of mere touch drags down inside of a month, even a week, one who is not endowed with extra purity. A good man may take even ten years, but he is sure to go down the incline of vice. There is a constant conflict between the habit which we have inherited and the study of modernist books. The

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question often arises—can society altogether abjure contact between the sexes? I have not been able to come to a decision. Such, in short, is my sorry plight."

This is the usual state of many youths and young women. There is only one way for such young people. They have to avoid all contact of the opposite sex. The checks and restraints described in our books were the result of experience gained during those times. They were, no doubt, necessary for the writers and their readers. To-day every aspirant has to pick out from them the necessary items, and add new ones which experience may make necessary. If we draw a circle round the goal to be reached, we shall find many ways leading to the goal, each one according to his needs.

An aspirant who may not know his own mind will certainly fail, if he blindly copies another.

True Way to Brahmacharya

Having said so much by way of caution, I must add that to find the true way to *Brahmacharya* through a study of court cases and erotic literature, is as fruitless as the effort to find the proverbial flower in the heavens above. The true way is not to be found in English law courts or in the novels. They have their use in their limited field, but they are of no use to the aspirant after *Brahmacharya*. English men and women who tread the difficult path are not afflicted by the imaginings of the correspondent quoted above. Those whom I have in mind have their God enthroned in their hearts. They are neither self-deceived, nor would they deceive others. To them their sisters and mothers

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are ever thus, and for them all women are in the place of sisters and mothers. It never occurs to them that every contact with them is sinful, or that it is fraught with danger. They see in all women the same God they see in themselves. It will betray lack of humility to say that such specimens do not exist because we have not come across them. Lack of belief in the possibility would also amount to lowering the standard of *Brahmacharya*. There is as much error in saying that there is no God because we have not seen Him face to face or because we have not met men who have had that experience, as there is in rejecting the possibilities of *Brahmacharya* because our own evidence is to the contrary.

—*Harijan*: July 6, 1947.

40. RULES FOR BRAHMACHARYA

I PLACE before the readers a few simple rules which are based on the experience not only of myself, but of many of my associates:—

1. Boys and girls should be brought up simply and naturally in the full belief that they are and can remain innocent.
2. All should abstain from heating and stimulating foods, condiments such as chillies, fatty, and concentrated food such as fritters, sweets and fried substances.
3. Husband and wife should occupy separate rooms and avoid privacy.

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4. Both body and mind should be constantly and healthily occupied.

5. Early to bed and early to rise should be strictly observed.

6. All unclean literature should be avoided. The antidote for unclean thoughts is clean thoughts.

7. Theatres, cinemas, etc., which tend to stimulate passion should be shunned.

8. Nocturnal dreams need not cause any anxiety. A cold bath every time for a fairly strong person is the finest preventive in such cases. It is wrong to say that an occasional indulgence is a safeguard against involuntary dreams.

9. Above all, one must not consider continence even as between husband and wife to be so difficult as to be practically impossible. On the contrary, self-restraint must be considered to be the ordinary and natural practice of life.

10. A heartfelt prayer every day for purity makes one progressively pure.

—*Young India*, Oct. 13, 1920.

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Raipur, Bantalab
Jammu.
2868(b)
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RULES FOR CONTINENCE

1. Boys and girls should be brought up simply and naturally in the full belief that they are and can remain innocent.
2. All should abstain from heating and stimulating foods.
3. Husband and wife should occupy separate rooms and avoid privacy.
4. Both body and mind should be constantly and healthily occupied.
5. Early to bed and early to rise should be strictly observed.
6. All unclean literature should be avoided.
7. Theatres, cinemas, etc., which tend to stimulate passion should be shunned.
8. Nocturnal dreams need not cause any anxiety. A cold bath every time for a fairly strong person is the finest preventive in such cases.
9. Above all, one must not consider continence even as between husband and wife to be so difficult as to be practically impossible.
10. A heart-felt prayer every day for purity makes one progressively pure.

—M. K. GANDHI

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EDITED BY : ANAND T. HINGORANI